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“THE CHILD IN THE MIDST”:  
MODERNISM AND THE PROBLEM OF CHILDHOOD INTERIORITY

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the  
Graduate School-New Brunswick  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Literatures in English

written under the direction of

Marianne DeKoven

and approved by

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New Brunswick, New Jersey

October, 2012

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“The Child in the Midst”:

Modernism and the Problem of Childhood Interiority

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This dissertation argues that ironic representations of childhood fueled modernism’s emergence and set the stage for a little-known, but unprecedented body of modernist children’s literature. Between the haunted children of Henry James and the many drowned children in Gertrude Stein’s wartime writing, modernism shape-shifts around the figure of the disenchanted child.

In the first half of the dissertation, I examine the figure of “the child in the midst” from the emergently modernist writings of Henry James to the late modernism of Djuna Barnes. In *What Maisie Knew* and in *The Turn of the Screw*, James ironically turns figurations of childhood — from simplicity to division, from transparency to opacity, from innocence to ambivalence — and in so doing he also turns the novel toward ironic, ambivalent, and limited points of view. At the other end of the modernist timeline, Djuna Barnes’s *Robin Vote* is figured as a child and as a modernist work of art. Through her character’s devastating conjuncture of modernism and childhood, Barnes performs a

double critique of figures (the child) and narratives (modernism) of re-invention on the eve of WWII.

The waning years of modernism are a watershed for modernist children's literature. In the second half of the dissertation, I argue that these two phenomena are profoundly linked. The turn to children's literature operates as a politically radical extension of modernism's longstanding challenge to childhood and serves, in addition, as a crucial aspect of late modernism's rejection of high modernist methods and forms. In his works for children, W.E.B. Du Bois compares the problem of the color line to the child/adult divide and seeks to democratize the gap between them in part by addressing the black child as an adult. Stein's wartime writings about and for children are similarly anti-nostalgic. The disillusionment of the lost generation is rooted for Stein in the nineteenth-century romanticization of childhood. Stein's late modernism is preoccupied with representing and with killing children, with writing and with destroying children's narratives as the conjoined prerequisites for killing the nineteenth-century child in the midst.

## Acknowledgments

I could neither have hoped nor dreamed for a better dissertation director than Marianne DeKoven. Marianne played a number of roles for me throughout this process. She has been my motivational speaker par excellence, with an enthusiasm as reliable as it was infectious. She has been my closest advisor, unwaveringly fair and patient, not to mention uncannily spot-on. She has been a brilliant resource whose own scholarship in the fields of feminist, modernist, postmodernist, and now animal studies has consistently forged a path for work that is gutsy, pressing, and intellectually profound.

Each and every member of my committee, including Cheryl A. Wall, Harriet Davidson, and Patricia Crain, has shaped this project in ways both definite and indelible. Cheryl made *The Souls of Black Folk* the center of my universe for a semester and more. Harriet set me on a path to re-appreciating late modernism. And Pat introduced me to cultural studies of childhood. I could not have completed this work without their exceptional guidance through every stage of the writing process.

I also owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Michael McKeon for his meticulous and candid feedback on parts of the dissertation's second chapter, work-shopped in his 2009 Mellon Dissertation Seminar on the Problems of Historical Interpretation, and to all of my fellow colleagues in that workshop. Most especially, I would like to acknowledge the help of my fellow workshop participants, Shakti Jaising, Natalie Roxburgh, and Sonali Barua, whose words of advice and encouragement helped to fuel my ongoing revision of that chapter. I have been fortunate to have published a version of chapter one in *The Henry James Review* 31 (2010): 95-110, and I am grateful for the suggestions for revision that the readers and editors of that journal provided which have helped me to

reshape the chapter for the dissertation. Similarly, readers' reports from *PMLA* aided me tremendously in sharpening my thinking on Du Bois in chapter three.

For many of these chapters, it has been my great privilege and pleasure to conduct research at a number of wonderful institutions and libraries. The librarians at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst where I studied W.E.B. Du Bois's papers went out of their way to provide me with access to materials for chapter three. Similarly, I have rarely met more knowledgeable librarians than those at Yale's Beinecke Library who helped me enormously in my research on Gertrude Stein for chapter four.

I received financial support from a number of sources which truly enabled the research and time necessary to complete this work. I would like to thank the Rutgers English Department as well as the University more broadly for supporting my participation in conferences, for supporting my research efforts, and for supporting the first stages of the writing process with a generous fourth year fellowship. In addition, one of my most substantial and meaningful sources of funding has come from the Mellon Foundation, which not only funded my participation in the dissertation writing seminar with Michael McKeon but which also funded a full final year of dissertation writing and revision. As important as the funding itself has been the efforts of many colleagues to help me to procure it. Many of these advisors have already been named, but I owe a special thanks again to Marianne DeKoven and Patricia Crain as well as to John Kucich and Rebecca Walkowitz for their invaluable assistance in this daunting process.

For their unwavering moral support, I am also exceedingly grateful to Stacy Klein, to Cheryl Robinson, and to Courtney Borack. They have each shared their wisdom and strength with me in times of uncertainty.

Last, but always far from least, none of this would have been possible without the shared sacrifices of my family. To my dog, Frankie, to my mom, Debra, and to my wife, Michelle, I thank you for weaving the net to hold me. To Jasiu, I thank for being.

## **Dedication**

For Michelle  
& Jasiu



## Table of Contents

Abstract of the Dissertation	ii
Acknowledgments	iv
Dedication	vii
Table of Contents	viii
List of Illustrations	ix
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: “The “ <i>Partagé</i> Child” and the Emergence of the Modernist Novel in Henry James’s <i>What Maisie Knew</i>	26
Chapter 2: A Suspect Innocence: <i>The Turn of the Screw</i> , <i>Nightwood</i> , and the History of Modernism	73
Chapter 3: The Children of Double Consciousness: From <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> to <i>The Brownies’ Book</i>	154
Chapter 4: Drowning in Childhood: Gertrude Stein’s Late Modernism	208
Works Cited	280

## **List of Illustrations**

<i>The Dream</i> , Henri Rousseau, 1910	131
“Men of the Month, <i>The Crisis</i> , October 1918	173
“N.A.A.C.P.,” <i>The Crisis</i> , October 1919	174
“The Lynching Fund,” <i>The Crisis</i> , October 1916	175
“Shadows of Light,” <i>The Crisis</i> , October 1916	178
“As the Crow Flies,” <i>The Brownies’ Book</i> , September 1920	197
“As the Crow Flies,” <i>The Brownies’ Book</i> , December 1920	200
“As the Crow Flies,” <i>The Brownies’ Book</i> , March 1920	202

## Introduction

In this dissertation I work to trace modernism's specific aesthetic, cultural, and political preoccupation with childhood from the early child-centered works of Henry James to the late prolific children's literature of Gertrude Stein. Throughout, I argue that modernism innovates unconventional and often disturbing representations of childhood in ways that proved instrumental to modernism's own emergence and evolution from the 1890s through the post WWII era. Though canonical figures like T.S. Eliot, Langston Hughes, Gertrude Stein, and W.E.B. Du Bois all wrote *about* and *for* children, modernist studies has not only neglected this phenomenon of cross-writing but has also failed to examine the modernist child in terms that exceed the Romantic and post-Romantic paradigms of the previous century. Yet modernism's children have little in common with the child-ideal of the modern era. Indeed, the innocent, rejuvenating, and wondrous child comes under fire in these works, which not only feature damaged children but which also imagine "the child set in the midst" as an internalized mythology of ominous proportions.

In the nineteenth century, the Biblical image of "the child set in the midst" enjoyed new popularity, capturing the modern Anglo-American embrace of childhood as a widely beloved and emulable style of being. In Mark (9:35-37) and in Matthew (18:1-3), Christ took "a little child" and "set him in the midst" of his disciples as a reminder and emblem of divinity. In Matthew, Christ says both that "whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me" and that "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (qtd in MacDonald 7). For the popular children's writer and minister, George MacDonald, the lesson of the parable is clear. To be childlike is to be Christlike. In one of his *Unspoken Sermons* that

MacDonald titles “The Child in the Midst” (1867), he offers that childhood is a quality accessible to all ages, and it is the “*chosen type*” of heaven (9). Elsewhere MacDonald puts it this way: “He who will be a man, and will not be a child, must—he cannot help himself—become a little man . . .” (“Fantastic” 69). As MacDonald’s work suggests, the nineteenth-century writer was the equal of the nineteenth-century minister. MacDonald took his message about childhood to all ages. He sermonizes for adults, but, indeed, he is best known for his highly successful children’s books, including the Christian allegory *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871). Wilfrid Meynell’s 1892 anthology of Romantic and Victorian poetry uses the title “The Child Set in the Midst by Modern Poets” in part to highlight the role that art has played in “discover[ing] the Child” for the nineteenth century. But discovery is really only the beginning, for the true gift of these poets is not just that they embody a childlike “genius,” or even that they use poetry to glorify the child, but that they also succeed in capturing and enshrining the “the child-spirit” — “caught at last and prisoned” — in poetry (vi).

Though there were a number of competing discourses of childhood in the long nineteenth century, scholars like Judith Plotz, Alan Richardson, and U.C. Knoepfelmacher have shown that it was this discourse of an essentialized and glorified childhood, heralded in the Romantic era by poets like Wordsworth and Blake and enhanced in the post-Romantic era by the likes of George MacDonald, Lewis Carroll, and John Ruskin, that increasingly dominated the cultural imaginary of childhood.<sup>1</sup> Meynell and MacDonald each make clear that the child in the midst for many by the turn of the twentieth century is less an actual child than it is an emblem of the child within humanity,

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<sup>1</sup> See Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*, Richardson, “Romanticism and the End of Childhood,” and Knoepfelmacher, *Ventures into Childland*.

the self, the divine, and art. MacDonald insists that “any human being, especially if wretched and woe-begone and outcast” would have done “as well as a child for the purpose” of the parable, but that God “employed” the image of the child “as a manifestation, utterance, and sign of the truth that lay in his childhood, in order that the eyes as well as the ears should be channels to the heart . . .” (9). For Meynell likewise it is important to distinguish that “These are Poems about Children, not for them: gathered together for mature Readers” . . . to give “the Child a new meaning and glory” (i). As Judith Plotz observes, “what is most striking about the new embrace of childhood” in the nineteenth century “is the de-contextualizing of the child.” For Plotz, what explains the “nineteenth-century idolatry toward the ‘Child set in the midst,’” following several religious upheavals and the failure of the French Revolution, is the Romantic child’s symbolic placement “beyond the shocks of history.” The child grows in symbolic power for all that it enables in these adults, including the promise of social hope without the risk of actual social and political engagement (39).

Throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century this quintessential child is not only predominantly a symbol of Edenic salvation, it is also importantly a symbol for internalization. Meynell and MacDonald each abstract the literal scene from the Bible of the child being set in the midst along two distinct lines. Not only do they read childhood as a symbolic quality accessible even to adults, but they likewise read the child’s position “in the midst” as a symbolic space of interior preservation. The child is to be embraced, taken in, enshrined, captured, and made central to every layer of spiritual, social, aesthetic, and personal existence. In *Strange Dislocations*, Carolyn Steedman has intricately traced how notions of human interiority evolved in the long nineteenth century

alongside developing notions of childhood and history. The idea of a self within the self was a crucial modern invention that lit upon the “*littleness*” of the child as well as its fictionalized, deeply romanticized capacity for representation in order to express the past life, the inner world, that each individual was increasingly believed to contain (9-11). Steedman uses the figure of Mignon as a case study for this historical phenomenon. In Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* Mignon is a child abducted and brought up as an acrobat in the midst of a traveling troupe of rope-dancers. But despite her fictional origins, Mignon became a part of the popular imaginary of childhood in the nineteenth century. For Steedman, Mignon represents the “strange dislocation” that has abducted the child from her real context and internalized a fantasy of her elsewhere. The popularity and reach of the Mignon trope, eventually utterly dislocated from Goethe’s novel, showcases how the fictional child — the Romantic child — became, in the post-Romantic era, internalized as childhood itself.

The “child set in the midst” is the emergent, symbolic forerunner of popular psychology’s “inner child” of the 1950s, yet its applications were at once much looser and more narrow than this successor. The image of the child in the midst resonated across a range of social, personal, and aesthetic structures, but at the same time, and regardless of context, the tenor it conveyed toward childhood was often limited to reverent optimism. In the postmodern era it became increasingly common to interrogate this child within — to challenge the potential fiction at the root of nostalgic longing. Implicit behind Steedman’s and Plotz’s accounts of how the Romantic discourse of childhood gains real-life status for adults while paradoxically obscuring the complex and varied

lives of actual children is a recognition of the fallibility of cultural memory and internalization.

But this skepticism is not, or is not originally, a postmodern phenomenon. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it may have seemed inconceivable to imagine an enemy of the redemptive child in the midst, yet it is my contention that much of modernist literature from the 1890s through the post WWII era imagined itself precisely in this way. I argue that the push to reconceive nineteenth-century notions of childhood not only drove much of the period's formal innovation, it also fueled an oft-overlooked, deeply dark literature for children. Across the nineteenth century, the ideal adult was often hailed as preserving an inward connection to childhood. Decades later, this narrative resurfaced in popular psychology's efforts to heal the "child within." But for many modernists the lure of this child is a siren's song. Writers like Virginia Woolf, Henry James, W.E.B. Du Bois, Gertrude Stein, Walter Benjamin, and Djuna Barnes use their narratives to test the limits of innocence, simplicity, naiveté, and nostalgia. In these fictionalized experiments, inexperience is often an invitation to exploitation; characters die or go mad from too much innocence; and nostalgia is an illness whose cure requires a remove, not a return to childhood.

Where many in the nineteenth century had looked to the child, as to the past, for a stable set of virtues to counter the immense material and social changes of the modern industrial era, modernists prove to be far more concerned with imagining styles of being that are varied and plastic enough to survive the onslaught of abandonment, despair, prejudice, and war. Modernism reconfigures many of its central child figures to this end, ironically turning the child's unitary into double consciousness, innocence into "eyes

wide open” precocity, and shelter into exposure. To a significant extent, early modernist narratives actually emerge out of these child-reversals. And late modernism, perhaps more strikingly still, produces one of the darkest, most sardonic bodies of children’s literature in the twentieth century. Between the divorce-torn and haunted children of James, the double consciousness of Du Bois’s “Brownies,” and the many drowned children in Stein’s wartime writings about and for children, modernism shape-shifts around the figure of the disenchanted child.

In the same year that Meynell married the figure of the “child set in the midst” to nineteenth-century poetry, Henry James began planning out in his notebooks a story that would invert everything this salvific narrative held dear. The idea is of a child “*divided*” between two divorced parents, since remarried. James reflects:

Might not something be done with the idea of an odd and particular relation springing up 1st between the child and each of these new parents, 2d between one of the new parents and the other—through the child—over and on account of and by means of the child? . . . Best of all perhaps would be to make the child a fresh bone of contention, a fresh source of dramatic situations, *du vivant* of the original parents. *Their* indifference throws the new parents, through a common sympathy, together. Thence a ‘flirtation,’ a love affair between them which produces suspicion, jealousy, a fresh separation, etc.—with the innocent child in the midst. (126-127)

Though James uses words like “fresh” and “innocent,” what is original in his schema for the story that will become *What Maisie Knew* (1897) is the role that he imagines for the child. Rather than being a restorative cure-all for the ailing/sinful adult, this child is set in the midst to incite greater conflict and vice. “The innocent child in the midst” serves to enable and arouse feelings of “suspicion, jealousy, a fresh separation, etc.” Her mere presence at the center of this society is pivotal to its disintegration. The “fresh”ness that this child brings to the adult mind and to adult society fails to be a vehicle for virtue;



rather it is like a fuel that keeps the fires of corruption flaming, adding more sources for “contention” and more sites for “separation” and division. What James imagines is that the child’s symbolic role may just as easily be appropriated for ill as for good. The child’s presumed innocence may be embraced, to be sure, but it may also be exploited; it may be emulated but it may also be counterfeited.

For modernists the child in the midst is not an ideal, it is a problem. James ironizes the quintessential features of essentialized childhood (innocent, fresh, natural) in order to challenge their pretensions to virtue. Following James, the image of the child in the midst repeats throughout modernist literature as the ironic center of narratives and lives bent toward destruction and despair. To showcase the devolving society of *Nightwood* (1936), Djuna Barnes positions the child of a degenerative line “in the midst” of the novel’s “inverts,” charlatans, and circus performers (103). To highlight the everyday anxiety of WWII France, Gertrude Stein describes youth not only set in the midst of war but also “carried off from” families and communities, removed from “in their midst” (*Wars* 86). The truest fact of wartime existence for Stein is that “there is a mingling” between “children’s lives and grown up lives” (7). In her wartime writings, children die, drown, and disappear with a regular insistence that belies any cultural effort to shield and preserve the child as a revered race apart. And Virginia Woolf, to capture the problem of an essentialized childhood “lodged . . . whole and entire” in the adult mind, never compromised or questioned, anticipates the notion of the inner child with its darkest twin. She calls this full, psychological embrace of childhood the “impediment in the centre of . . . being.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I expand my analysis of this quote from Virginia Woolf’s essay on “Lewis Carroll” (81-82) in the final chapter of the present project.

These writers are intensively invested in challenging reverent notions of childhood at the center of the adult mind, society, family, and art. Though it has become commonplace in childhood studies to point out the immense gaps between ideas about childhood and the lives of actual children,<sup>3</sup> so many modernist thinkers and writers recognized that the symbolic cohabits not just with, but within the life. Just as many modern adults nostalgically long for a fictionalized version of childhood they never actually had, actual children can and do internalize the myths, fantasies, and fairy tales of childhood.<sup>4</sup> For Du Bois the post-Romantic emphasis on sheltering the innocence of youth is a misguided strategy for the rearing of black children, who face inevitable race prejudice. In *Darkwater* (1920), Du Bois advises black parents that they “can no longer wholly shield,” the child when to do so is to produce “wayward, disappointed children” (119-120). Muriel Rukeyser recalls in poetic form the compulsion of childhood “to be happy” as an impossible part to play just as James’s Maisie experiences her mother’s frustration that she is not as little girls presumably ought to be: “simple and confiding” (45). *Nightwood*’s queer society strives hopelessly to realize the romances from childhood, a fairy tale quest exposed as “the sweetest lie.” Set as children on a path they were, as adults, unable and disallowed to fulfill, the “long lie” of centuries of childhood “drops” for them “into dissolution, into drugs and drink, into disease and death” (114). Similarly for Stein, the disillusionment of the “lost generation” of WWI survivors is the greatest proof that a seemingly free and “easy” youth is — in the long run — an

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<sup>3</sup> Jacqueline Rose’s argument that there are no children in children’s fiction, because children’s literature is entirely the product of adult writers, editors, publishers, and so on, has been one especially provocative instance of this distinction. Judith Plotz has also pointed out that the same Romantic poets who were utterly preoccupied with childhood in their thinking and in their art, cared little about the difficult lives of real children in their own time. At its best, this critical distinction has insisted that readers not confuse the fictionalized representations of children in any era with the experiences of actual children living in that era.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Spufford’s *The Child that Books Built* is an autobiographical example of the formative influence of children’s fiction on the lives of its readers.

enormous debt, paid for with the mature life. Frontloaded into the first years of their lives, their happiness was spent. Stein dryly concludes that life for this generation “was over by 30” (“The New Hope” 142). Having been born in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when “babyhood to fourteen” was cherished, Stein describes her life’s work as an effort “to kill” the ideals that belonged not just to the nineteenth century but in fact to her own childhood (*Wars* 20-21).

There is a child in the midst of modernism, but it is neither the child nor the modernism we are accustomed to seeing. When in 1939 Edmund Wilson, a prominent and influential scholar of modernism, was approached about reviewing two recent children’s books by celebrated modernists, T.S. Eliot’s *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats* and Gertrude Stein’s *The World is Round*, he writes that he “found himself baffled by the assignment.” Unable to review either book, Wilson turns the task over to another reviewer but not before printing, in the place of a review, an explanation of his trouble. After confessing that he “had difficulty in getting through the Stein book” and that he was “disappointed in *Old Possum*,” Wilson offers a scathing commentary on the state of modernism:

It is perhaps worth pointing out that there seems to be something like a general tendency on the part of the more ‘difficult’ writers to go in for children’s books. Kay Boyle has done a book about a camel; and E. E. Cummings is rumored to be engaged on a book of fairy-tales. I don’t know what this means—except that they evidently do not feel at the moment that they have anything better to do. (qtd. in Curnutt 115)

After feigning to pass on the task of reviewing the two books in question, Wilson offers his assessment anyway. And he does much more, reading *Old Possum* and *World* as indications of a larger modernist trend. Though Wilson also feigns “bafflement” about

“what this [tendency] means,” he is nonetheless certain that it is both not worth the modernist scholar’s or the modernist writer’s time.

Before discussing where I think Wilson gets it wrong, I want to highlight how much he does in fact get right. Many celebrated modernist writers did write for children. The list is, in fact, much longer than Wilson describes. Djuna Barnes and Carl Sandburg also published for children. And many modernists who did not publish for children in their lifetimes, including James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner, still wrote full length stories for children in their families. The modernists who wrote and published most extensively for children were at the center of the Black Renaissance movement. Langston Hughes, Jessie Fauset, Countee Cullen, Georgia Douglas Johnson, W.E.B. Du Bois, Arna Bontemps (and more) produced a substantial body of literature for African American children in the twenties, thirties, and forties.

Wilson is also substantially right about the timing of this movement. Though W.E.B. Du Bois pushed the envelope of modernist children’s literature in the 1910s, most well-known modernist writers turned to writing for children in the movement’s later stages. Gertrude Stein wrote a series of children’s books in the late thirties and early forties. Langston Hughes produced many of his works for children in the thirties, and in 1967 the controversial children’s book, *Black Misery*, was the last book he wrote before he died. Djuna Barnes similarly labored in the last years of her life over her first and only book for children, *Creatures in an Alphabet*, posthumously published in 1982. Countee Cullen’s two children’s novels were published in the early 1940s. Kay Boyle ultimately wrote three books for children. *The Youngest Camel* appeared in 1939, was revised and reprinted in 1959, and two other juveniles followed in the mid sixties. Even those authors

who wrote in a more intimate way for child relatives did so mostly in the period from the mid twenties through the forties. It is unclear when E.E. Cummings began writing his *Fairy Tales* but that writing likely continued through the 1940s — even though the collection remained unpublished until 1965. William Faulkner's *The Wishing Tree* was first written in 1927 and published four decades later. James Joyce wrote a series of *Cat* stories including *The Cat and the Devil* in 1936. The latter wasn't published until 1964 and another, slightly earlier, *The Cats of Copenhagen* was only recently printed in a 2012 limited edition. And Virginia Woolf wrote *The Widow and the Parrot* and *Nurse Lugton's Curtain* for her nieces and nephews between 1923 and 1924, just before the tour-de-force *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). These children's stories likewise remained unpublished until 1982 and 1965, respectively.

Despite modernism's preoccupations with ironic figurations of childhood and despite the concentrated abundance of children's literature in late modernism, Edmund Wilson's dismissive conclusion that modernist writers "evidently do not . . . have anything better to do" than write children's fiction, epitomizes the lackluster history of this literature's collective reception. Many scholars have asserted the view that modernism was hostile to children's literature and to childhood, but it would be truer to say that we as readers have been hostile to modernism's interpretations of childhood and children's literature.<sup>5</sup> There are important exceptions. Scholars like Juliet Dusinberre and Douglas Mao have produced book-length studies of the child figure in modernism's adult

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<sup>5</sup> David Rudd has argued that the reason for modernism's minimal presence in the world of children's literature is not because children's literature denied its entry but because "modernism deliberately distanced itself from what it saw as the restrictive world of children's writing" (300). Similarly, William Gray contrasts modernist literature as an "acquired taste" most often encountered in college coursework with the populist and pleasing impulses of children's literature (28).

literature.<sup>6</sup> And scholars including Kimberly Reynolds and Karin Westman have taken important steps in the study of modernist children's literature.<sup>7</sup> Still, there have been few attempts to read across these genres and audiences: to connect the child so central to modernism's emergence with modernism's late, prolonged turn to children's narratives. But put together, these shifting preoccupations with childhood shed a different light on the history of modernism if not also on the history of childhood.

Histories of childhood and children's literature have routinely skipped modernism. Jacqueline Rose brought attention to this problem as early as 1984 when in *The Case of Peter Pan* she argued that the conservative conventions of children's literature writing and publishing had excluded the possibility of a modernist children's literature (142). Rose may not have been aware at that time of the number of modernist children's books in and out of print, but in part her lack of awareness supports the observation. The vast majority of these children's books were published (when they were published) in limited numbers. But Rose is also susceptible to her own charge. Published in 1911, J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* could be read as an emergently modernist children's book, but instead Rose reads it as an exemplar of children's literature conventionality. Yet most scholars cannot be said to even struggle with the issue in the way that Rose does. For instance, James Holt McGavran's collection, *Literature and the Child: Romantic Continuations, Postmodern Contestations*, makes the decision to skip modernism self-evident.

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<sup>6</sup> Dusinberre's *Alice to the Lighthouse* and Mao's *Fateful Beauty* differ from the present study in a number of ways. In addition to including children's literature as well as a special attention to unconventional representations of childhood, the present study focuses on American modernism whereas Dusinberre's and Mao's are studies primarily in the British context.

<sup>7</sup> Reynolds devotes an important part of the introduction and first chapters to modernism and children's literature in her *Radical Children's Literature*. Westman edited a special issue of *The Children's Literature Association Quarterly* in 2007 on the "space between" modernism and children's literature.

Other studies that include early twentieth-century movements and trends, skip modernism's subversive discourses in favor of the more dominant, popular discourses of the era. Hugh Cunningham describes the first half of the twentieth century, in light of new labor laws, the playground movement, and education reform, as even more committed to fulfilling the nineteenth-century promise "to save children for the enjoyment of childhood" (137). When the focus is literary, rather than social history, the master-narrative remains the same. Focusing on widely popular "golden age" children's literature, *A Critical History of Children's Literature* describes the period from 1890-1920 (the period of modernist emergence and experimentation) as a time of "rightful heritage," when the idea that children's literature "could exist for the purpose of giving pleasure and delight," an idea that "had come into being in the first fifty years of the nineteenth century," was inherited and brought to "maturity."<sup>8</sup> Even when the focus is psychology, the early twentieth century often becomes part of a long nineteenth-century narrative of childhood. Carolyn Steedman's otherwise exceptional study of how childhood becomes central to modern ideas of human interiority extends its argument from 1780 to 1930 with little mention of modernism. Even when modernism is the focus, the child-subject almost invariably meets a hermeneutics of nostalgia. Juliet Dusinberre's groundbreaking study of British modernism and the child, *Alice to the Lighthouse*, is a case in point. Though known for "radical experiments in art," when it comes to the figure of the child, Dusinberre argues that British modernists like Virginia Woolf return for inspiration to the literature they read themselves as children — some 50 years prior. Though *Alice to the Lighthouse* is a tricky read, in my reading of it, it centrally suggests

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<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Nesbitt, "1890-1920: A Rightful Heritage," 315 and Ruth Hill Viguers, "1920-1950: The Golden Age," 437.

that Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* of 1863 reaches full fruition in the 1920s fiction of Virginia Woolf.<sup>9</sup>

Though modernism is often characterized as a period of self-conscious rupture with the social and aesthetic conventions of the nineteenth century, histories of childhood and children's literature have routinely collapsed modernist difference into nineteenth-century likeness. In large part, this is because the child's cultural value grew exponentially through the first part of the twentieth century, just as modernism was likewise achieving its own height of notoriety, if not popularity. In psychoanalysis, Freud's theories of the unconscious and infant sexuality helped to cement the child's status in the early twentieth century as the epicenter of the family and the self. In science, G. Stanley Hall's work sparked the child study movement. Whereas Freud's observations on childhood were developed in the absence of children, Hall and his followers' research regarding the education and upbringing of actual children drove reform efforts in the Progressive era. According to Alice Boardman Smuts, the 1920s was neither the decade of the flapper nor of the bootlegger; it was "the decade of the child." Whereas in 1918 there were only 5 full time psychiatric scholars of childhood, by 1930 there were more than 600 (1). "More than in any other period in American history," Smuts asserts, "trends in science and society converged to place the child at center stage" (2). In one sense, Progressive era reforms from the nursery school to the playground movement to anti-labor laws for children worked under the presumption that childhood was "priceless" but in another they worked under the premise that childhood was an investment that could be

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<sup>9</sup> In her review of *Alice to the Lighthouse*, Susan Gannon captures both the immense value of Dusiinberre's undertaking and the difficulties of its unconventional, "free-form" critical method (152).



cashed out, with interest accrued, in the future.<sup>10</sup> Before the first world war, child welfare programs were widely driven by humanitarian impulses for the good of the child, but in postwar society, Smuts shows, child welfare was increasingly viewed as a means to a greater end: reforming and improving the nation (6). In other words, though Edmund Wilson could imagine almost anything more important than writing for children, in the context of America's social and psychological history no turn could have been more valuable or could have held as much potential for transformative change as the direct address of America's children.

At the period of modernist emergence in the late nineteenth century, artists and psychologists alike were rethinking the child in the midst, but they did so in dramatically different ways. While Freud posed the most controversial challenge to society's romance with the Edenic child by replacing it with a theory of infantile sexuality, he nonetheless cemented even further the importance of childhood to adult, social, and cultural evolution.<sup>11</sup> With Freud, childhood experiences, more than ever, hold the key to adult life. On the one hand, Freud's work was radical, suggesting just how far the role and consciousness of childhood could be rethought, but on the other it was as normativizing, if not more so, than its predecessor. Freud's ideal child was the precursor of the white, male, heterosexual patriarch and toward his development Freud laid out strict parameters for normal (and deviant) progress.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, when Gertrude Stein asks "what is the

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<sup>10</sup> Here I am combining the insights Viviana Zelizer's *Pricing the Priceless Child* about the decreasing economic but rising sentimental value of children from 1870 to 1930 American society with Smuts's arguments about society's imagined future returns on investments made in childhood.

<sup>11</sup> Freud's theoretical assertions linking the unconscious to childhood were in fact highly indebted to German Romanticism. See George Makari's chapter "City of Mirrors, City of Dreams" in his *Revolution in Mind*.

<sup>12</sup> Carol Gilligan, in her groundbreaking study *In a Different Voice*, argued that, beginning with Freud, developmental psychology throughout most of the twentieth century widely equated normative child development with male development.

use of being a boy if you are growing up to be a man” (as she so often does), she epitomizes the modernist’s skepticism not only about any central utility of childhood but about any necessary cord connecting child and adult life. While it is true that modernism’s fascination with the limits of consciousness (its unreliability, unknowability, and complexity) was directly inspired by the insights into stream of consciousness, double consciousness, and the unconscious made by advances in psychology, the epistemology of modernism is importantly divergent from turn of the century socio-scientific discourses. Where the latter were driven by the unknown to know: to plot normative stages of developmental progress and to understand all of the ways in which individuals can be led astray from them, much of modernism is characterized by an epistemology of uncertainty and hermeneutic suspicion and by methods that are deconstructive, unresolved, and ambivalent.<sup>13</sup>

G. Stanley Hall’s psychology of childhood, like Freud’s, was revolutionary in the early twentieth century but for very different reasons. Where Freud challenged romantic notions of childhood innocence, Hall extended the romantic discourse of childhood beyond the purely conceptual, aesthetic, or theoretical into arguments about the practical treatments of children. As Smuts puts it, “The goal of child-rearing, as he [Hall] and other romantics saw it, was to preserve as much as possible of the divine in the child,” drawing out and cultivating what is already in the child rather than impressing the child from without (50). By the 1920s the child’s central ground had pragmatically expanded from “the chosen type” of heaven and art to become the center of education and political reform. In 1930 Herbert Hoover expressed what many in America felt, that “If we could

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<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of modernism’s hermeneutic skepticism see Michael Bell’s “The metaphysics of Modernism.” For a discussion of the unresolved dialectics and ambivalence of modernism see Marianne DeKoven’s chapter, “Modernism under Erasure,” in her book-length study, *Rich and Strange*.

have but one generation of properly born, trained, educated, and healthy children, a thousand other problems of government would vanish” (qtd in Smuts 140). Alongside the child, the “new psychology” took central stage in Progressive era reform efforts. After the success of the first world war, many Americans felt in the twenties and thirties that serious attention to young children and to psychological knowledge could be combined to solve all social problems (142). The optimal way to reform the nation and to achieve the dream of American democracy was “to go to the source” and “reconstruct” the child (148).

Late modernism’s turn from child forms to children’s narratives is foregrounded by the practical and political turn of the child studies and child welfare movements. In fact, the most successfully published of these modernist writers were supported by an apparatus of such reforms. Gertrude Stein’s first book for children was solicited in part by Margaret Wise Brown based on applied research in education at The Bank Street School in New York. *The World is Round* (1939) was first tried out on actual children at the Bank Street Writer’s Laboratory before being published as part of that school’s commitment to designing books tailored to the “here and now” of childhood. W.E.B. Du Bois also links his substantial body of work for children to the principles of education and social reform. Du Bois’s contributions to *The Crisis*’s annual Children’s Number and later to *The Brownies’ Book*, a premier periodical produced by African Americans for black children, aimed both to educate young readers about race prejudice, violence, and poverty the world over and also to instill a profound sense of racial solidarity, pride, and responsibility for social uplift.

But while pragmatic, child-centered reform movements in America arguably provided modernists like Du Bois and Stein with a template for re-forming modernism across new genres for new audiences, they also provided modernism with an ironic mechanism for taking its suspicions about the value of childhood directly to children and for undertaking a significant critique of the nation that this child was supposed to shape. Kimberley Reynolds, inspired in part by modernism's children's literature, has argued that children's literature is in fact one of the genres most conducive to a politics of subversion. While children's literature can serve conservative, mainstream interests, it has also historically served as "a breeding ground and an incubator for innovation." "Many textual experiments," Reynolds argues, "are given their first expression in writing for children" (15). Ironically, it is children's literature's presumed commercialism that makes radical children's literature so possible. Reynolds, following Julia Mickenberg's study of radical children's literature during the Cold War, points out that children's literature's struggle to be taken seriously by critical readers enables experimental children's narratives to fly "under the cultural radar" (15). Stein and Du Bois are connected not just by the degree but by the sardonic tenor of their engagement with children's narratives. Du Bois's "Crow" persona in *The Brownies' Book* is in so many respects Du Bois's own alter-ego. He represents an ordinary, caustic reform not just of Du Bois's earlier Talented Tenth ideology but for all generally romantic role models for children.<sup>14</sup> Stein's alphabet book, first reader, and fairy tale geographies are to an important extent parodies of their school-book counterparts. Stein not only consistently questions the formative value of children's narratives throughout her work of the thirties

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<sup>14</sup> At the turn of the century, Du Bois argued that a crucial step in the progress of African-American racial uplift was the recognition and higher education of the "Best of this race" so that they might then "guide" the "Mass" ("The Talented Tenth" 33).

and forties but she also plots children's narratives in which children are actively uncelebrated (literally, Stein's children die, and they do so routinely in a world without birthdays).

Across the spectrum of its history, modernism takes shape against the presumed centrality of childhood to self and social progress. Even the most contemporaneous discourses of child psychology, far from guiding modernism's interests in the child, actually enhance the tenor of modernism's efforts to unseat the essential child from the center of psycho-social value. As the nation turned increasingly to children as an investment in forming the future subject and in reforming the future nation, modernism turned increasingly toward child readers as a way of countering these efforts. Just as scholars like Judith Plotz, Alan Richardson, U.C. Knoepfelmacher, and Marah Gubar have undertaken to complicate the discourses of childhood that have dominated interpretations of Romantic, Victorian, and Golden Age literature, this study seeks to move the child in the midst of modernism out from under the shadows of psychology, progressivism, the Romantic and the post-Romantic. Modernism's relationship to childhood was influenced by all of these movements but its skepticism not only of an essential child but of that child's quintessential position *inside* is unique to modernism, and it is one of the features I argue that makes modernism modernist.

In the nineteenth century, the ideal adult was often hailed as preserving an inward connection to childhood. Well into the twentieth century, childhood, so cherished and so desired, became something to be preserved at all costs. The home, the garden, and the kindergarten set up walls around it. The mind preserved it in memory and sustained it, long into adulthood, as the key to individual authenticity. "Healing the child within" (to

take a phrase from mid-century popular psychology) meant so much more than that — it meant healing adulthood, and it meant healing the nation. But for many modernists the modern era's extreme investment in the child comes at the price of the mature life. Yet rather than turn away from the child, modernism emerges and develops out of a series of challenges to childhood. Early and late, modernism breaks with the post-Romantic child, first by imagining ironic reconfigurations of childhood and later by seeking to influence an alternative child psychology. The fictional children in Henry James's turn-of-the-century writings and the lives of black children in W.E.B. Du Bois's contemporaneous studies of race in America are characterized by a profound and lasting double consciousness. And the children's literature of many of these modernists strikes a parallel chord. Du Bois instructs the readers of *The Brownies' Book* in a global awareness divided between hope and sorrow. Stein's works for children violently deconstruct the image of the post-Romantic child along with the fairy tale, alphabet, and primer forms in which many actual children have been schooled.

In the dissertation's first chapter I examine the figure of the divided child in Henry James's *What Maisie Knew* (1897) and its pivotal role in shaping one of James's most important contributions to modernist fiction: the psychological turn in content matched by form. Rather than follow and preserve the ideals of childhood, James fashions forms modeled on the limitations of childhood consciousness and innocence. *What Maisie Knew* initially purports to be a novel given to following the limited and evolving consciousness of a child divided, within and without, in a "manner," it is said, "worthy of . . . Solomon," by the divorce (and pursuant remarriages) of her parents (35). But from the outset the narrative follows, as much as Maisie's knowledge, Maisie's

evolving method of detachment and restraint to counter the free fun and liberal impulses of the adult society that envelops her on all sides. Indeed the narrative performs a gradual sleight-of-hand whereby what Maisie knows becomes more and more replaced as a subject of narrative interest by how she contains, compartmentalizes, and withholds knowledge. In the end, I argue, that *What Maisie Knew* is remarkable for the way that the narrative changes course, ultimately following Maisie's psychological method in the place of the psychological content of her consciousness. Maisie's strategies for resisting a corrupt and impulsive adult order, those of silence, secrecy, and diversion, also come to characterize the narrative technique of a novel that never, at last, reveals what Maisie knew.

In the second chapter I continue to examine modernism's formal innovations in challenge to childhood, but in this case I focus on the specific problem of innocence. This focus is important not only because it becomes intertwined with one of modernism's core ideologies of innovation but also because it allows me to take a long view of modernism's history and to present a specific case for how modernism was shaped, early and late, around this particular disenchantment. In this chapter I begin with Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and end with Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936) in order to show that the irreverent view of innocence that lent itself to modernism's "make it new" aesthetic also ultimately undermined any hope for that principle's sustained success. James's novella challenges the cultural value of childhood innocence. For Flora and Miles, the compulsory innocence of childhood, as policed by their governess, becomes a curse curable only by illness or death. And yet the "blank slate" of childhood innocence is also the inspiration for James's form. He not only models *The Turn of the*

*Screw* off of the fairy tale, but he also imagines its structure as a series of imaginative “blanks.” At the other end of the modernist timeline, Djuna Barnes’s *Robin Vote* embodies the ominous innocence so central to James’s work as well as the now equally suspect innocence of modernist art. Robin’s heartless innocence is conveyed through the narrative’s various associations of her character with childhood and with primitivist art. Written on the eve of WWII, this conjuncture of a modernist aesthetic with the ideations of childhood works, I argue, to suggest the human cost that such narratives of negation and re-invention can entail.

In the second half of the dissertation I set these troubled child tropes of modernism in conversation with the movement’s substantial and understudied turn to children’s literature. For W.E.B. Du Bois and Gertrude Stein writing for children entailed a dual revisionary process: to reconceive the child and, at one and the same time, to reimagine modernism. In the third chapter I argue that W.E.B. Du Bois’s works for children are the most systematic and systematically overlooked echoes of his watershed study *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). As arguably one of the first modernist texts by an African American, *Souls* not only spoke to the psychological, political, and daily complexities of being black in America but it also inscribed that complexity into the form of its telling. And yet, as Susan Wells writes, “After the dazzling performance of *Souls*, Du Bois seldom attempted a form of address so complex” (123). Although there has been a tendency to read Du Bois’s child-centered writings as part of his shift toward propagandist, pedagogical discourses of racial uplift, there is ample evidence to suggest that these texts, like *Souls*, resist the rigors of classification by inhabiting the uncertain regions between culturally conflicted genres, disciplines, and traditions.



More importantly, Du Bois's works for children prove to be crucial sites for the conceptual reworking of those central metaphors of *Souls*: the color line and double consciousness. While in *Souls*, Du Bois famously proclaimed that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line," by the time he writes *Darkwater*, his emphasis has changed. Not only does he add the problem of women's uplift "next to" the problem of the color line (105), now he also writes, "All our problems center in the child" (125). Beginning with the Children's Numbers of *The Crisis*, the problem of the child/adult divide comes to parallel and even to equal, for Du Bois, the divisions of race. Du Bois's new focus on "the problem of our children" strengthens in his running contribution to *The Brownies' Book*, "As the Crow Flies." Here, I show how Du Bois structures a divided discourse that seeks to systematize double consciousness as a distinctly black cultural identity and as an unconventional means for social progress for blacks in America.

Like Du Bois, Gertrude Stein writes extensively about and for children in ways that cross the conventional lines and genres of age. In the final chapter on Stein's wartime experiments with children's narratives I show how she shared in this project of troubling the child/adult divide with a view to supplanting the post-Romantic child ideal with a more resilient, survivable subjectivity and form. After the long-awaited popular success of her 1933 *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein entered a prolonged period of writer's block. When she resurfaced in 1934, her writing was noticeably altered by a new investment in children's narratives. In addition to her works "for children": *The World is Round* (1939), *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays* (1940), and *The Gertrude Stein*

*First Reader* (1941), nearly every work Stein produced from 1934 through the end of her career in 1946 incorporates children's narratives in one form or other.

But overwhelmingly, for Stein, this is a parodic turn. Stein's children's narratives of this era are preoccupied with representing and with killing children, with writing and with destroying children's narratives. In *Wars I Have Seen* (1945), Stein associates an enemy Germany with the child-loving ideologies of the nineteenth century. Stein's explicit proposal in this text "to kill the nineteenth century" carries with it, I argue, the correlative aims of winning the war and of destroying these ideologies of childhood. In Stein's works for children, the alphabet book, first reader, and the fairy tale are satirically targeted, but children likewise die with regularity and with deadpan insistence. Typically, they drown. In this chapter I explore from multiple valences Stein's concern with drowning in children's narratives and her engagement with this almost canonical trope of child-death as various, insistent attempts to kill the nineteenth-century child in the midst.

At both ends of the modernist timeline, the interdependence between the modernist preoccupation with interiority and childhood proves to be profound. Where the very emergence of modernist form can be linked to an ironic engagement with the conventional features of childhood subjectivity, late modernism's attempts to change those conventions — to change not just the dominant ideals of childhood but also, potentially, actual child readers — helps to close the door on certain core forms and features of modernism. In the manner of a twice-told tale, I explore first how this shift takes place across the child-centered adult works of James and Barnes and second how it manifests itself in a remarkable trend of modernist cross-writing for a dual audience of adults and children. The turn to these new forms and subjects is a crucial part of

modernism's end and may well serve doubly as an important prologue for postmodernism's emergence.

Finally, it is worth highlighting that the project of exfoliating the historically shifting trajectory of modernism's relationship to childhood is vast and that my own study, because of its scope, has required certain self-imposed limitations. I have focused both much more heavily on early and late modernism as well as on the works of canonical modernist writers in order to showcase both the magnitude and the centrality of these changes. My focus is also predominantly on American modernism though I have drawn freely, as modernists themselves did, on important transatlantic influences. My aim is not to provide an exhaustive treatment but, quite the contrary, to suggest just how much more work there is to be done at the intersection of these equally dynamic fields.

## Chapter One:

### The “*Partagé Child*” and the Emergence of the Modernist Novel in Henry James’s *What Maisie Knew*

“...here you are taking care of a poor little boy with one arm, and there you are sinking a ship with the other. It can’t be like you.”

“Ah! But which is me? I can’t be two me’s, you know.”

“No. Nobody can be two me’s.”...

“Which me do you know?”

“The kindest, goodest, best me in the world,” answered Diamond, clinging to North Wind...

“And you are sure there can’t be two me’s?”

“Yes.”

“Then the me you don’t know must be the same as the me you do know—else there would be two me’s.”

- George MacDonald, *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871)

“...the little girl [was] disposed of in a manner worthy of the judgement-seat of Solomon. She was divided in two and the portions tossed impartially to the disputants.... This was odd justice in the eyes of those who still blinked in the fierce light projected from the tribunal — a light in which neither parent figured in the least as a happy example to youth and innocence.”

- Henry James, *What Maisie Knew* (1897)

### **James and the Post-Romantic Tradition:**

Since the turn of the nineteenth century, unity, singularity, and simplicity have often been hailed as the special provinces of childhood. For George MacDonald and for his child readers in the post-Romantic era, the impossibility of a divided self carries the full force of common knowledge and sure logic. In this religious allegory, the premise that allows the boy protagonist, Diamond, to reconcile apparent tragedy with the fundamental goodness of God (the North Wind) is the certainty that there “can’t be two me’s.” The same is implicitly true for King Solomon, millennia prior. Solomon risks the physical division of the contested child because he can be assured of that act’s impossibility. The true mother, he anticipates, will put love of child over victory in battle, will prove her rightful possession of the child through her ability to give him up. The

allusion to Solomon at the opening of Henry James's *What Maisie Knew* consequently prepares the way for a double irony. Not only are Maisie's parents quite willing to divide her, but divided she is, decreed under the terms of her parents' divorce to spend six months in rotation with each. In this emergently modernist novel, Maisie, unlike Diamond, develops the "art of not thinking singly" — always at once ally and enemy in either parent's deeply embittered camp (176).

James conceives of the child divided as a consequence of familial and social problems and as the living embodiment thereof. In the foreground of the corroded and crumbling towers of the Victorian social elite, parents divorce, elope, and have affairs — all this, James writes, "with the innocent child in the midst."<sup>1</sup> Maisie, for James, is no less than the "extraordinary 'ironic centre'" for the novel, a source and "pretext" for the narrative's spreading and ever-devolving "system of misbehaviour."<sup>2</sup> But implicit in this treatment is a surprising "extraordinary" esteem for the child's divided state. What James early emphasized as the "*divided*" quality of his child protagonist, he later endeared in translation, recharacterizing Maisie in his notebooks as "the *partagé* child" (126; 134). Eric Savoy has observed that "in the world of Henry James, the surest sign of an expatriate's sophistication is the tendency—at once emphatic and off-hand—to sprinkle the conversational mix with French words and phrases" (196). *Partagé* certainly adds an element of sophistication, elevating the referential complexity of Maisie's division.<sup>3</sup> But

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<sup>1</sup> Henry James, *The Notebooks of Henry James*, eds. F.O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947) 127.

<sup>2</sup> Henry James, "Preface," *What Maisie Knew*, *In the Cage*, *The Pupil* (1908; Fairfield, NJ: Augustus M. Kelley, 1979) xi; vii.

<sup>3</sup> In French usage, *partager* can mean either "to share" or "to divide." James's notebook revision, consequently, might be seen as a thickening of Maisie's character, encapsulating her dual intermediary capacities as divider and connector. James's comment in the preface that Maisie is continually "bringing people together who would be at least more correctly separate" and "keeping people separate who would be at least more correctly together" technically fulfills both senses of the verb, but it is worth noting that the

what Savoy notes in passing, the contrary combination of the “emphatic” and the “off-hand,” speaks more strongly to the character of this translation. In the French, Maisie’s division is at once emphasized and it is made intimate. It is a marked signal of the growing familiarity not only between author and subject but between the external event (that is, the act of dividing) and the internal child. Where “*divided*” had described Maisie, “the *partagé* child” now comes much closer to actually naming her. As the *partagé* child, Maisie’s divided and divisive capacities are multiplied. She is the product of social, psychological, and narrative conflict, but she is also and more peculiarly the embodied catalyst for compounding complications as well.

This sense of the child’s as a problematic and problematizing interior was nearly inconceivable a mere generation prior. “So much that the Victorians held dear,” Lewis C. Roberts writes, was centered in the “potent symbol” of childhood.<sup>4</sup> Where sentimental fiction was concerned, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon notes that “Whereas children are virtually absent from eighteenth-century popular fiction, they populate every manner of sentimental text in the nineteenth century.”<sup>5</sup> From Stowe’s little Eva to Burnett’s wildly popular *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, the sympathetic possibilities of childhood offered hope for overcoming society’s greatest conflicts.<sup>6</sup> Then too, boy books and girl books were also a crucial means of starting children early on down the path of nineteenth-century

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sense of connection in this case is connotatively aligned with the disruptive sense of its counterpart (PR viii).

<sup>4</sup> Lewis C. Roberts, “Children’s Fiction,” *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, eds. Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Company, 2005) 367.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, “Sociality and Sentiment,” *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004) 204.

<sup>6</sup> Anne Scott MacLeod, *American Childhood: Essays on Children’s Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), writes that “by the 1850s authors were harnessing children’s literature to the cause of social protest” (146). Elizabeth Maddock Dillon also writes of the vital role the sentimental child and the special mother-child bond of the Victorian period played in discourses of democracy (197-236).

separate spheres.<sup>7</sup> Domestic fiction, often featuring the reformation of the girl rebel (paralysis was a method popularized by Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did*), trained female readers in the conventional virtues of "self-control and sacrifice" and prepared them for their future roles as angels of domesticity. Boy adventurers upheld British imperial ideals: exploring, conquering, and ruling as a matter of their superior cultural and moral right. And fantasy and fairy tale (such as MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind* and Charles Kingsley's tale of a boy chimney sweep's underwater journey to salvation in *The Water-Babies*) spoke to childhood's transformative capacity, privileging and upholding the child's imagination and innocence as possible pathways to social and adult reform. Childhood, conceptualized in the terms of natural, domestic, and moral ideals, was so highly esteemed in the nineteenth century that the extreme imaginative attempts at its preservation are now legendary. Certainly, child death was a fact of life in the nineteenth century, but nowhere is it more common and more idealized than in the fiction of the period. Stowe's Eva, Kingsley's Tom, and MacDonald's Diamond all die. Dillon describes the imaginative reproduction of child death on a mass scale as the "best means of preserving the very innocence that distinguishes the child from the adult." "Growing up," she goes on to say, "becomes something of a tragedy when childhood is the source of freedom and moral truth."<sup>8</sup> Again and again, the Romantics and post-Romantics tell us, the child is the teacher of the adult. Indeed, the ideal adult for many nineteenth-century writers for children is one who has succeeded in "preserv[ing] most completely

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<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Segel argues that it is "the sharp differentiation of male and female roles, well underway by the mid-nineteenth century," more than "economic feasibility," which "mandated separate books for girls and boys" during the Victorian period. "As the Twig is Bent . . .": Gender and Childhood Reading," *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts*, eds. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocino P. Schweickart (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) 165-186.

<sup>8</sup> Dillon, 205.

the qualities of childhood.”<sup>9</sup> George MacDonald, for one, claimed that “He who will be a man, and will not be a child, must—he cannot help himself—become a little man, that is, a dwarf.”<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, as MacDonald suggests, the nineteenth-century movement to “save the child,” to preserve childhood in the face of industrial and domestic exploitation and abuse, was one which was taking place as much in the nineteenth-century psyche as it was in society at large.<sup>11</sup> The Romantic and post-Romantic child signaled not only urgent social and political needs, but it also acquired a second, abstract, spatial dimension, one which did not belong to its person but to adults seeking renewed and restorative re-entry to childhood: what U.C. Knoepfelmacher eponymously terms “Ventures into Childland.” Carolyn Steedman, through a study of the famous child acrobat Mignon, argues, in fact, that the concept of human interiority developed in concert with the growing admiration and reverence for childhood in the period from 1780-1930. Popular theories in science and psychology also played an important part, according to Steedman, making it possible to imagine (for example, in the way of cellular theory) a second and original self, microcosmically replicated within the human frame. As the individual’s original self, as the “little” rendition thereof, and as the ideological bearer of moral innocence, spiritual beauty, and pure sentimentality, childhood and human interiority became nearly identical concepts.<sup>12</sup> The marriage of interiority and childhood is, by now, a familiar concept.

Indeed, since the 1950s when the phrases “inner child” and “the child within” were

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<sup>9</sup> MacLeod, 24.

<sup>10</sup> George MacDonald, “The Fantastic Imagination,” *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, Ed. David Sandner (1890; Westport: Praeger, 2004) 69.

<sup>11</sup> For the social and historical dimensions of child preservation see Hugh Cunningham’s “Saving the children, c. 1830-c.1920,” *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2005) 137-170.

<sup>12</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).



coined, the self-encased immortal child has reached the surface-most layers of popular consciousness. But like the semantics, the meanings have changed. Contemporary notions of the child within are just as likely to represent inner demons or past suffering as they are to represent nostalgia for a past life. Overwhelmingly, however, the childhood interior held for the adults of the nineteenth century a porous, spatial quality, offering a place to which they could return over and over again away from present, social corruption to a replenishing, innocent past.

Between the contemporaneous and the nineteenth-century perspective, the difference might be reduced to the terms of consistency and outlook. The nineteenth-century view of the child within was, not surprisingly, systematically constant in its optimism. For many today, it would seem to deny the undeniable influence of childhood's association with the unconscious and, hence, with the unpredictable. But, in actuality, many in the nineteenth century seamlessly wed the accident with the predictably good in their concepts of childhood. Walter Pater's "Child in the House" (1895) provides a condensed view of the emergence of childhood-as human interiority alongside this paradoxical treatment of its professedly "accident[al]" nature. In "the environment of early childhood," Pater writes that the "influences of...sensible things...are tossed and fall and lie about us, so, or so" as to seem "insignificant, at the moment." And yet, he writes:

How indelibly, as we afterwards discover, they affect us; with what capricious attractions and associations they figure themselves on the white paper, the smooth wax, of our ingenuous souls, as 'with lead in the rock for ever', giving form and feature, and as it were assigned house-room in our memory, to early experiences of feeling and thought, which abide with us ever afterwards, thus, and not otherwise....and the early habitation thus gradually becomes a sort of material shrine or sanctuary of sentiment; a system of visible symbolism interweaves itself through all our thoughts and passions; and irresistibly, little shapes, voices,

accidents—the angle at which the sun in the morning fell on the pillow—become parts of the great chain wherewith we are bound.<sup>13</sup>

One's sense of the aesthetic, of the beautiful, of the sacred, and of the "ideal" (all Goods, with a capital "G"), are reliably developed, for Pater, through the heightened sensory experiences of childhood. And yet, ironically, none of these are the products of design.<sup>14</sup> They are the result of "accident," for not only does the child not control what impressions nature and man will "toss" his way, but he also seems to bear no conscious relation to their consequent impressionability. His sympathies are unconscious. In other words, the child has no control over either what he encounters or over what will stick.

But out of this chaos, comes form, and not form merely in the aesthetic sense but form in the psychologically permanent, spiritually ever-lasting senses of interior identity and soul. The "attractions and associations" of childhood, "capricious" though they may be, mark us nonetheless "indelibly." The "habitation" of childhood and the impressions thereof become "sanctuar[ies]" of "feeling and thought." Body replaces wood and stone; experience and ideas replace parlor and bedroom; sensation and memory replace furniture and decor. If these comparisons seem overwrought, they are not more so than Pater's own. From the beginning, Pater grapples with the figurative word. He calls forth two of the more popular metaphors of the child mind, as "white paper" and as "smooth wax," before alighting on the figure of the house. From first to last, the transformation is best characterized by a gradual deepening. The concept of the child as *tabula rasa*, popularized in the eighteenth century by John Locke, associates the child mind with

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<sup>13</sup> Walter Pater, "The Child in the House," *Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays* (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1895) 177-178.

<sup>14</sup> Pater makes this quite explicit a page later when speaking of the "peculiarly strong sense of home." He writes: "So powerful is this instinct, and yet accidents like those I have been speaking of so mechanically determine it; its essence being indeed the early familiar, as constituting our ideal, or typical conception, of rest and security" (178). Note that from the power of the accident, the ideal and the familiar become one and the same.

flatness, with absence. Like a blank sheet of paper, it is precisely nothing until it is written upon by circumstance. Who one is to become, under this model, is entirely an exterior matter. The child has no agency as such; on the other hand, parents and teachers, especially for Locke, have enormous power with regard to him and as a result have also an irrevocable responsibility as well. The model of the child's mind as wax or clay, one which ultimately dates, like the *tabula rasa*, to ancient Greece, differs from the blank slate by its three-dimensionality. Though smooth, though featureless and unformed, there is something, rather than nothing, there from the start, but the something is diminished as well by the fact that it too must be impressed and shaped by the hands of experience and example.

These metaphors are apparently inadequate for Pater; he catalogues them, but in this way he also discards them: writes them in such a way as to write them off. To the figure of the house, Pater, confers much greater dimension and depth. To start, Pater's metaphor for child experience, turned adult interior, suggests an outside as well as an inside. Outside there is room for the familiar influences of example, education, and sensory experience, but inside there is room as well, something which even the 3-dimensional model of wax fails to afford. Not only is their interior space, but that space would appear to be multiple. Pater's statement that "the influences of sensible things" are "assigned" internal "house-room" implies not one room but many. But, most importantly, the metaphors of white paper and smooth wax are inadequate because they posit a child to be transformed rather than preserved. There is more value to wax that is well-formed than otherwise. And too Locke's slate is never blank for long; nor would he want it to be. Locke's theories concerning childhood and education are forward-looking and utilitarian,

devoid of sentiment, devoid of nostalgia. For Pater, the child is the architect of the man-house, filled with unequivocal memories and values from early life, and he is also its primary resident. The title of Pater's essay "The Child in the House" speaks as much to the child's early, accidental impressions at home as it does to childhood's special life-long influence on individual identity.

Pater's essay is especially helpful because it sits at the cusp of two aesthetic and historical periods, the Victorian and the modernist. It fits solidly within Steedman's conclusions that human interiority developed from 1780-1930 as a result of a longing to reclaim the lost self of childhood. The child's house, for Pater, is a strangely porous interior. Though Pater repeatedly notes the ignorance of the child in terms of recognizing the value and significance of his own experiences, he just as often notes the keen hindsight of the adult's retrospective gaze. For him all windows are clear and unfettered. He sees the child within with unsurpassed intensity and clarity. And yet, he cannot relive those sacred, "brain-building" moments. He can remember but not relive. Pater is not without ambivalence in the face of this fact. In the same passage where he describes the sensorial accidents through which the "material shrine and sanctuary" of the childhood home is created, he also describes these same accidents as the creators of "the great chain wherewith we are bound." And in the essay's conclusion, Pater identifies the child as the agent of loss. He writes: "Sensibility—the desire of physical beauty—a strange biblical awe, which made any reference to the unseen act on him like solemn music—these qualities the child took away from him, when, at about the age of twelve years, he left the old house, and was taken to live in another place" (196). The child is so bound to the initial interior, the house-made-home, that upon leaving it, he is effectively separated

from himself. In other words, Pater describes feeling irrevocably bound to the child in the house but also feeling irrevocably barred from him as well.

Pater's ambivalence falls firmly in the territory of the nostalgic, but it suggests in two ways the differences that are to come in the manner of the modernist treatment of the childhood interior. Like Pater, James seeks out a new metaphors for figuring childhood's attachment to the human interior. And he even takes up and extends the special symbolic and multiple interiors of the home. But unlike the Paterian house, and the post-Romantic perspective it embodies, the divided and alienating houses of James are far from porous, far from transparent. Maisie's is a childhood interior that denies the nineteenth-century push to revelation, that resists the easy coming and going of the nostalgic, the sentimental, the desiring, or even the merely curious. In other words, though I want to highlight the ways in which James represents a real and marked shift in thought with regard to the internalization of childhood, I also want to emphasize that this shift was not without some precedent.

And yet, James's epistemologically "closet"ed Maisie refuses to fit into the historical model that Steedman constructs for childhood and human interiority in her time. Though Steedman herself acknowledges that her work "has not told the whole story,"<sup>15</sup> by extending her timeline, along with her model, through the 1920s, she effectively reads the nineteenth century into the modernist, suggesting either that there were no differences between the two or that the changes of modernism, whatever they may have been, were slight, bordering on insignificant. To be fair, Steedman is far from alone in this gesture. In fact, conventional scholarship routinely describes that period in the twentieth century, at least through the 1920s, as a heightened expression of

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<sup>15</sup> Steedman, 171.

nineteenth-century ideals regarding childhood. Hugh Cunningham describes the nineteenth-century “concern [with] sav[ing] children for the enjoyment of childhood” as even more central to the first half of the twentieth century, when the “overriding aim was to map out a territory called ‘childhood’” and to “prevent too early an escape from what was seen as desirably a garden of delight.”<sup>16</sup> The esteemed *A Critical History of Children’s Literature* similarly describes the period from 1890-1920 (the period of modernist emergence and experimentation) as a time of “rightful heritage,” when the idea that children’s literature “could exist for the purpose of giving pleasure and delight,” an idea that “had come into being in the first fifty years of the nineteenth century” and had “in the last fifty years” become “more firmly established,” was inherited and brought to “maturity.”<sup>17</sup>

At the root of these views, which see continuity in the place of difference in the history of childhood and children’s literature from the nineteenth century into the twentieth, is the profound consensus that the post-Romantic child is of a different breed than is the adult. Where realism widely supplanted Romanticism in the adult literary world and where modernism supplanted or at least splintered off from there, children’s literature, it is argued, remained invested in Romantic ideologies.<sup>18</sup> Extrapolated through time, the basic idea is that where views of childhood were at one time (in the eighteenth century and prior) not so dissimilar from their adult counterparts, as adult literature

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<sup>16</sup> Cunningham, 137; 172.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Nesbitt, “1890-1920: A Rightful Heritage,” *A Critical History of Children’s Literature* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953) 315 and Ruth Hill Viguers, “1920-1950: The Golden Age,” *A Critical History of Children’s Literature* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953) 437.

<sup>18</sup> MacLeod, 125. Also Gail Schmunk Murray, in *American Children’s Literature and the Construction of Childhood* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998) 147, argues that although children’s literature did begin to evince by the 1920’s some aspects of realism such as that to be found in the descriptions of setting as well as in the more balanced conceptualization of the abilities and emotions of the child, the idealism of children’s literature maintained overarching importance, especially with regard to the nuclear family as the stable, hopeful, and ever-pleasant center.

moved further and further from the Romantic, it also moved further and further from childhood. And yet, there is something of a self-fulfilling prophecy here at work, for the critics who see conventional continuity focus their sights predominantly on conventional texts. A focus on mainstream “classical” texts helps to tell a very classical mainstream story.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, scholars of modernist literature have proved equally hesitant to enter the still semi-mythical space of modernist children’s literature. Though significant work has been done to corrode the bulwarks of modernist elitism and to include (among others) the feminist, the queer, the black, the transnational, and the populist, relatively few have ventured into child territory.<sup>20</sup> Whatever the reasons for this reluctance, it speaks to the presumed distance, if not presumed incommensurability, between modernism and literature for children.<sup>21</sup> Modernism, though popular even in its time, though global in its reach, was definitively not what so much children’s fare either was or has come to be conceived as—mainstream. Forged in the spirit of the new, enthusiastically wielding the tools of experimental method and form, modernism reacted violently against the conventions and ideals of the nineteenth century. But given that so many of these ideals were centered, to borrow from Pater, in the post-Romantic “child in the house,” it is no wonder really that a new childhood interiority should emerge in the

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<sup>19</sup> There are, of course, exceptions, such as Alison Lurie’s *Don’t Tell the Grown-Ups: The Subversive Power of Children’s Literature* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), but even Lurie recognizes her work as such, framing itself against “classic children’s fiction,” where “it is assumed that the world of childhood is simpler and more natural than that of adults, and that children, though they may have faults, are essentially good or at least capable of becoming so” (xiii).

<sup>20</sup> A change is presently underway in this regard, at least within the field of children’s literary studies. In 2007, Karin E. Westman edited an issue of the *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 32.4, devoted to the intersection of modernism and children’s literature. It is, to my knowledge, the first of its kind.

<sup>21</sup> This gap has been recognized by Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children’s Fiction* (1984; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992) 142 and by Karin E. Westman, “Children’s Literature and Modernism: The Space Between,” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 32.4 (Winter 2007): 283.

divided houses of James. But given this, it is a wonder, I confess, how this child, radical and new, ever came to be so overwhelmingly invisible.

**Maisie, The Unconventional Interior:**

In 1895, having tried and failed for five years to achieve success on the stage, Henry James set his sights on a new method and a new novel, one which sought to merge the “scenic method” he had recently mastered as a playwright with the genre in which he had long since made a name for himself. Most directly, his inspiration was a story he overheard at a dinner with the Bryce’s in 1892, an apparent real life account of a child who “was *divided* by its parents in consequence of their being divorced.” James was struck not only by the court’s decision that the child “was to spend its time equally with each—that is alternately” but also by the effects of renewed marriages on both sides (*Notebooks* 126). Indirectly, James tells, in *A Small Boy and Others* (1913), of an “epoch-making” event from his own childhood when he first learned the value of “scenes.” At the center of the memory is James’s child cousin, Marie. Having unhappily traveled to Albany with his father on news of grave family illness, James watches as his uncle Augustus “expressed the strong opinion that Marie should go to bed,” expressed it James perceives in hindsight with “the casual cursory humour” that was to empty it of authority if not style. Marie’s response, unthinkable to James at that point in his young life, is an adamant refusal. What follows is something of a blur of retaliations, a “visible commotion,” propelling Marie into her mother’s sickly arms “as for refuge,” but instead, her mother implores: “Come now, my dear; don’t make a scene—I *insist* on your not making a scene!” As James tells it, “That was all the witchcraft the occasion used, but the note was none the less epoch-making. The expression, so vivid, so portentous, was one I



had never heard...it told me so much about life. Life at these intensities clearly became ‘scenes’; but the great thing, the immense illumination, was that we could make them or not as we chose.”<sup>22</sup> Part of the ‘immensity’ of the illumination, however, is not simply that “we,” or people in general, have the power to make or not make scenes but that the child in particular, a child of James’s own age, “could make them or not as [*she*] chose.” So much seems to depend upon the child being just so that the slightest infraction from her, a mere refusal to go to bed when told, has the ability to throw a moment into dramatic relief, to reduce her parents to uncontrolled anger and beseechment. From another angle, the child, from the sheer weight of the expectations heaped upon her, has actually an immense power. The slightest move from her to one side or the other of the line of her conventional demarcation and all order, all propriety, threatens to collapse.

Maisie, like Marie, becomes an “extraordinary ‘ironic center’” for James. From the original premise of the child divided and the parents remarried, James imagines her as the center and source for dramatic complications. He wonders:

Might not something be done with the idea of an odd and particular relation springing up 1st between the child and each of these new parents, 2d between one of the new parents and the other—through the child—over and on account of and by means of the child? [...] Best of all perhaps would be to make the child a fresh bone of contention, a fresh source of dramatic situations, *du vivant* of the original parents. *Their* indifference throws the new parents, through a common sympathy, together. Thence a ‘flirtation,’ a love affair between them which produces suspicion, jealousy, a fresh separation, etc.—with the innocent child in the midst. (*Notebooks* 126-127)

Maisie represents for James the singular and as such remarkable exception to the rule of symmetry that governs the narrative’s larger design. In fact, he imagines her as the means for new, insidious combinations, otherwise impossible. Through her, governess and

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<sup>22</sup> Henry James, *A Small Boy and Others, Autobiography*, ed. Frederick W. Dupee (1913; New York: Criterion Books, 1956) 106-107.

father are united. Through her, this same governess turned stepmother and Maisie's equally new stepfather meet and have a legitimate excuse to meet again. She becomes a lure and a decoy for many of her mother's adulterous suitors. And she is a source of amusement all around, at least as much is true initially. Maisie is the center that holds all of these balanced and competing extremities together. And she is the intermediary go-between, through which they communicate, connect, and of course do battle.

But Maisie is no ordinary center, no ordinary go-between, epitomizing as she does the precise opposite of that which she connects, divides, and mediates. In addition to finding herself torn between the opposing principles of parents, step-parents and competing governesses, Maisie is also herself an opposing, ironic figure. In the 1908 preface, James expands on the idea:

To live with all intensity and perplexity and felicity in its terribly mixed little world would thus be the part of my interesting small mortal; bringing people together who would be at least more correctly separate; keeping people separate who would be at least more correctly together; flourishing, to a degree, at the cost of many conventions and proprieties, even decencies, really keeping the torch of virtue alive in an air tending infinitely to smother it . . . (viii)

Maisie's virtues are of an unconscious sort. Little more than her presence is required to unravel the superficial virtues of society and family, those of "correct[ness]," "propriety," "convention," and "decenc[y]." At every turn, James imagines her, like his cousin Marie before her, as effortlessly performing an intense irony, of lighting upon society's (and the reader's) most trained expectations and turning them, in the most offhand, matter-of-fact way, completely inside out. In other words, the irony carries through at every level, from the outcome, to the method, to the agent. As the bearer of indecency (which, true to his ironic design, James reads as virtue), Maisie is herself the most ironic of ironies in the novel. Though no reader would profess to desire either the unhappiness or demise of the

child, both would be preferred to her unthinkable ability to “flourish” in ironic proportion to the crumbling moral foundation of her surrounding social order. If this were a nineteenth century novel and the writer was (and probably would be) really serious about saving Maisie’s innocence, then Maisie would likely face one of three options. Her negligent parents might suddenly and fortunately die (e.g. *Huckleberry Finn*); she might be abandoned or run away to discover a new, more ideal family elsewhere (e.g. *Oliver Twist* and, again, *Huckleberry Finn*); or she might die a most moving death (e.g. *Little Eva*). Stripped of these, the ideals of innocence — as the ever-fragile quality of absence — command nothing less than the premature corruption of Maisie’s soul, a fate which can be horrifically imagined before it has actually, novelistically occurred.

And yet, James insists not only that Maisie’s parents live and that she lives but that she thrives “in [their] midst.”<sup>23</sup> James repeatedly emphasizes Maisie’s “freshness” in the face of overwhelming degradation, insists that her ability to “successfully resist...the strain of observation and assault of experience” is none other than the “very principle of her appeal, her undestroyed freshness” (preface xi, xiii). Given the child subject, it is tempting, no doubt, to read freshness as innocence. Throughout the history of scholarship on *Maisie*, many have done just this. And, typically, such readings also share a moralizing tendency, claiming for Maisie a moral epistemological growth.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly,

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<sup>23</sup> James records the former decision in his August 26, 1893 notebook entry, 134.

<sup>24</sup> James W. Gargano’s “*What Maisie Knew*: The Evolution of a ‘Moral Sense,’” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 16. 1 (1961): 33-46 is an explicit attempt to read *Maisie* through a traditional lens. Gargano sees no reason to distrust James’s professed desire to “save” Maisie and therefore sees the novel as saving her in the conventional Victorian sense of innocence saved. But there are many more attempts to read *Maisie* as a hybrid variation of the nineteenth-century moral novel. Alfred Habegger, in “Reciprocity and the Market Place in *The Wings of the Dove* and *What Maisie Knew*” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 25.4 (1971): 455-473, argues for a morality of reciprocity in the novel. Jean Frantz Blackall too sees a revised hybrid morality in *Maisie*, one part Mrs. Wixian moral imperative and one part Sir Claudian sensibility, in his “Moral Geography in *What Maisie Knew*” *University of Toronto Quarterly: A Canadian Journal of the Humanities* 48 (1978): 130-148. More recently, John Carlos Rowe has argued for a morality in *Maisie* which seeks to

James's contemporaries did not make this same mistake. Reviewers widely criticized the novel for its immorality. One writes: "What Maisie Knew is of a quality incredible in a writer whose work has heretofore been, morally, beyond reproach. In what it says, still more in what it suggests, it ranks, except for a terrible underlying dullness, with the worst schools of French fiction."<sup>25</sup> Another refers even more strongly to Maisie as a "small monster,"<sup>26</sup> and a tamer review even acknowledges that James has chosen in *Maisie* "an eminently unpleasant subject."<sup>27</sup> Aside, therefore, from rendering freshness into the not-so-fresh (given the countless other literary investments in innocence saved), the more recent tendency to see Maisie's freshness as innocence also dulls the point of James's presentist language. Minus the child subject and all of the assumptions that such a subject gives rise to, freshness points connotatively and denotatively to the new. Even when writing of the child, in the notebooks, James's use of the term illustrates his overriding interest in novelty, as when he writes of his plans "to make the child a *fresh* bone of contention, a *fresh* source of dramatic situations" (italics mine). Maisie does what

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bridge the pre-modern and the modern, "claiming thereby to redeem modern society from its decadence," in "The Portrait of a Small Boy as a Young Girl: Gender Trouble in *What Maisie Knew*" *The Other Henry James* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) 120-154. Ellen Pifer's "Innocence on the Brink: James's *What Maisie Knew*" *Demon or Doll: Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000) 28-42 stands as something of an exception to this moralizing trend. Though Pifer acknowledges that James challenges conventions in certain ways, freshness, for her, is not one of these. Rather, she perceives James's claims for freshness as the persistence in the text of a "romantic" ideal of childhood. Finally, Christina Britzolakis in "Technologies of Vision in Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 34.3 (2001): 369-390, similarly misreads "freshness" as a "residual" of "Romantic nostalgia," a reading which leads her likewise to see a "vexed...split" in James's Preface to the novel (371).

<sup>25</sup> "What Maisie Knew," *The Literary World; a Monthly Review of Current Literature* 28.25 (December 2, 1897): 454.

<sup>26</sup> "Henry James's New Work: 'What Maisie Knew,'" *New York Times* 27 November 1897: BR9.

<sup>27</sup> "Books and Authors," *Outlook* 57.11 (Nov 13, 1897): 670. There are some exceptions to this general rebuke of *Maisie* as an immoral novel. A review entitled "Mr. James New Novel" in *Current Literature* 22.6 (Dec 1897): 505, perceives Maisie's mind as remaining "unsullied" and argues too that the story is "so well" told that "the sense of its unpleasantness is forgotten in the reader's admiration of the author's fine restraint." James's friend and ally, William Dean Howells also came to his aid and defended James's later work, including *Maisie*, against readerly "enmity," which he attributed, by and large, to female readers. See "Mr. Henry James's Later Work," *The North American Review* 26.554 (Jan 1903): 125-132.

fictional children rarely if ever do, which is to actively “flourish” in the face of an oppositely “barren” environment, one that, to compound matters, seeks nothing less than to “smother” her as well (preface viii).

This is not to say, however, that James’s approach is unambiguous. Maisie is, at the novel’s opening, most assuredly innocent. “Nothing could be more touching at first,” James writes at the end of the opening court scene, “than [Maisie’s] failure to suspect the ordeal that awaited her little unspotted soul.” Here the language of innocence, of the blank slate as “unspotted soul,” produces a mountain of sorrowful expectations among the members of the court audience. These, and presumably the reader as well, James writes, “were persons horrified to think what those in charge of it [Maisie’s soul] would combine to try to make of it.” The observers’ horror stems from two basic sets of assumptions. The first is that Maisie’s parents, those “in charge,” have authority not only over Maisie but over her interior formation. The second is that Maisie is, in turn, defenseless, powerless to such an external onslaught. These readerly projections derive purely and logically from the expectations of innocence as an ideal of want: of ignorance, of blankness, of defenselessness. But *Maisie* rejects both of these anticipated ends for its child protagonist and in so doing also necessarily troubles the ideals on which they are founded. *Maisie*, uncharacteristically, reveals the novel’s end in the beginning. James writes that contrary to expectations surrounding the parents’ certain besmirching of Maisie that “no one could conceive in advance that they would be able to make nothing ill” of her (37). Given the premise of the novel, that Maisie’s is a perceptive consciousness, that her knowledge indeed grows from beginning to end, Maisie’s freshness, preserved and intact, fails to coincide with the negative ideals of childhood

innocence, traditionally conceived as knowledge in absentia. In fact the narrator's pronouncement of Mr. Beale and Mrs. Farange's failed attempts to "make ill" of Maisie comes at the end of a paragraph which began with the equally surprising and equally premature announcement of the death of Maisie's childhood. Thus, by its third page, the novel presents a fundamental paradox; Maisie's freshness will be preserved at the same time that her childhood will be lost.

Freshness, as the ability to "successfully resist," to "flourish...at the cost of many conventions," is finally then not derived from circumstantial ignorance but from circumstantial defiance. Freshness, in other words, is most strongly the quality of difference in the face of overwhelming expectation. Maisie is set, by James, time and time again in opposition to the conventions around her, starting with the two critical assumptions of the court observer/novel reader, for neither do her parents have the power to inscribe her inner-most self nor does Maisie prove helpless against them. Like Pater before him, James attempts both a challenge and a revision of the terms figuring childhood interiority, emphasizing, to start, the limitations of traditional metaphors by placing them in the minds and mouths of Maisie's parents. At first, Beale and Ida take advantage of the unwanted and divided Maisie; each sees in her the means with which to punish the other. She becomes, for them, "a messenger of insult" (43). James writes of them first that Maisie is for them "a ready vessel," a "deep little porcelain cup in which biting acids could be mixed" (36) and later that "The evil they had the gift of thinking or pretending to think of each other they poured into her little gravely-gazing soul as into a boundless receptacle..." (42). The "ready vessel," the crucible, and the "boundless receptacle" all figure as little more than a blank slate given three-dimensional form. They

imagine a child with an interior, but that interior is perfectly empty, perfectly porous, and perfectly passive. It is theirs to fill, to manipulate, to corrupt, and to cull as they choose. It is an interior conceived in self-defeat, being not the property of its child host but the property of her parents.<sup>28</sup>

Though the model of the child as receptacle marks a three-dimensional development in the history of human interiority, James underscores its substantive links with the pre-modern. For Maisie's parents, both original and new, the hollowed child is never far from the child, dehumanized.<sup>29</sup> Early on, Maisie observes of the various men she encounters that "all of them thought it funny to call her by names having no resemblance to her own" and of the various women that they "addressed her as 'You poor pet' and scarcely touched her even to kiss her" (57). Of these various inhuman appellations, Maisie is most frequently called "monster" (74; 105; 154), but she is also referred to as "you little donkey" (53), as "you little horror" (177), and as "a dreadful dismal deplorable little thing" (178). And yet, Maisie's parents and the conventions they embody are consistently undermined by the narrative and by Maisie's perspectival role within it. As Maisie's parents attempt to monstrify Maisie, they are themselves narratologically transmogrified. The narrative intensely follows, for instance, Beale's teeth, always prominent and always "such a picture of appetite," (159) as well as Ida's "huge painted eyes," similarly phantasmagoric, like "Japanese Lanterns swung under

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<sup>28</sup> Though Maisie's parents may seem like monstrous exceptions to the rules of parenting, their views of Maisie's interiority are amazingly conventional. Referring to such popular Victorian metaphors of childhood as "The Child of Wax, The Ceramic Child," and "The Child Botanical," James R. Kincaid argues that "Over and over, this child-rearing discourse transfers the being of the child to the parent . . . reaching for a variety of metaphors to suggest openly that the 'child' is nothing more than what it is construed to be, nothing in itself at all" (90). *Child-loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> Prior to Locke, who made a central case for the child's capacity to reason, there was little to separate the child from the animal. See Michael Witmore's *Pretty Creatures: Children and Fiction in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

festal arches” (124). Together with their big eyes and their big teeth, Maisie’s parents form an unmistakable resemblance to the wolf in “Little Red Riding Hood,” except in this case they are truly her parents; they are her parents, and they are the wolf too. And, as to their vision of Maisie as “boundless receptacle,” this too finds expression in terms more akin to fantasy than reality. Literally, it is framed in the language of figuration — they pour evil into Maisie “*as*” if she were a “boundless receptacle.” The counterweight of that figuration is the narrator’s rather than the parents’ view of Maisie’s soul as “gravely gazing.” Maisie’s “little gravely-gazing soul” counters the perceived emptiness, porosity, and passivity of the “boundless receptacle” by giving her silence a somber weight and an active visual vehicle. Though Maisie does not speak, she yet sees “too much” (43).

Although Maisie’s parents succeed in using her as “a messenger of insult,” they fail in their larger aim of converting her to their respective enemy camps. Her parents conclude that “either from extreme cunning or from extreme stupidity, [Maisie] appeared not to take things in” (43) when taking things in is precisely what children are renowned for. The white paper of the eighteenth century was believed to so readily absorb the ink of life that Sir Roger L’Estrange opened his edition of Aesop’s Fables with the warning that “Children *are but* Blank Paper, *ready Indifferently for any Impression, Good or Bad (for they take All upon Credit) and it is much in the Power of the first Comer, to Write Saint, or Devil upon’t, which of the Two He pleases.*”<sup>30</sup> L’Estrange’s concern for the easy and lasting impressionability of childhood is echoed in the nineteenth century where, as Gillian Brown argues, one can see an “oscillat[ion] between admiration for and anxiety

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<sup>30</sup> Sir Roger L’Estrange, *Fables of Aesop and Other Eminent Mythologists: with Morals and Reflexions* (London, 1699) ii.



about children's absorptions."<sup>31</sup> The former admiration stems, according to Brown, from the post-Romantic nostalgia for the absorption of child's play, particularly for the unruly, adventurous play of boys which enacted the "origins of human progress," from imperialist expansion to frontier-building. The latter anxiety, a concern for the child's absorption in/of other, improper pleasures, was conversely directed more toward young girls, for whom play was perceived more as a "rehearsal for the future" of domestic responsibility than as a "reenactment" of past "vitality."<sup>32</sup>

The concern of Maisie's parents, therefore, that "she appeared not to take . . . in" their improprieties underscores theirs as a parental status antithetical to parenthood (43). They are, of course, also mistaken. Maisie, we later find out, has apparently been taking everything in but with an ability which neither of her parents suspect and which none of these children of history, boys or girls, has been deemed to possess: the ability to compartmentalize. At first, this is simply the result of Maisie's gift for short-term memory coaligned with her early "limited consciousness," or, in other words, her inability to immediately understand everything that she sees (preface ix). In fact, from ages six to eight, James writes that Maisie lived entirely for the actuality of the household of her present occupation. With "that lively sense of the immediate which is the very air of a child's mind," he writes, "the past, on each occasion, became for her as indistinct as the future." In effect, Maisie's is a mutable childhood. Moved as she is from place to place, hers is an interior which keeps pace with the back and forth, back and forth, between her parents. When it comes to her parents' evil messages, hers is not a boundless receptacle but a temporary post box. For two years, Maisie "faithfully reports" (absent

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<sup>31</sup> Gillian Brown, "Child's Play," *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*, eds. Caroline F. Levander and Carol J. Singley (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003) 20.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

full understanding) the “missive[s]” of her “beastly papa” to her “horrid pig” of a mother and vice versa; these drop “into her memory with the dry rattle of a letter falling into a pillar-box” where they are “as part of the contents of a well-stuffed post-bag, delivered in due course at the right address.” Whether as “messenger” or as the “little feathered shuttlecock they could fiercely keep flying between them,” Maisie’s early life is very nearly airborne, and her sense of interiority is similarly transitional: everything passes through her but nothing sticks (*Maisie* 42).

In other words, Maisie’s earliest experiences are of an emergent detachment. Denied the singularity of experience, of house, quintessential to childhoods like those imagined by Pater, Maisie’s early life is not an experience of security, comfort, and familiarity. What recurs in Maisie’s mind, time and time again, is an image of home as “domestic labyrinth” (90). Hers is a world full of the unknown, the mysterious, and the clandestine. In a dramatic revision of Paterian and Victorian transparency, Maisie imagines life as “like a long, long corridor with rows of closed doors.” “Everything,” she concludes, “had something behind it” (54). In the place of openness and intimacy, Maisie’s interiority models itself on spaces of domestic secrecy. In the “childish dusk” of her mind, Maisie finds a “dim closet” where “images and echoes” are stored in “the high drawers, like games she wasn’t yet big enough to play” (41). And with her doll, Lisette, Maisie’s own games, are “lessons” in secrecy. In the “darkness,” Maisie seeks to reproduce upon her doll the “impression” of her mother, “of having mysteries in her life...of shading off, like her mother, into the unknowable” (55). What Pater expresses as the traditional development of the human interior, the internalization of the earliest encounters with the external world, the internalization of home and landscape and family,

all are complicated in Maisie who is as “impressed” by what she does not encounter as by what she does. What Pater assumes is a home, the gift of modern notions of privacy, separate and safe from exterior circumstance and public intrusion.<sup>33</sup> What Maisie faces, by contrast, is a new and hostile world that has taken up residence around her, has sidled up close enough for her to ever feel her exclusion from it, like the “high drawers,” of her mental closet, visible yet just out of reach, or the “long corridor...of closed doors” rendering her home and her mind into an interior “labyrinth.”

### **Maisie's Method:**

As hostage and weapon by turns, Maisie is always within but never at one with her domestic environment. James pushes the point to an early climax, conferring on Maisie the necessity for an interiority new to childhood, defiantly so. After two years of divided existence, Maisie experiences a sudden “new feeling...of danger,” a realization that she has been deployed as “a messenger of insult...that everything was bad because she had been employed to make it so” (43). Interiority is not developed in Maisie as a matter of developmental course. It is developed in her as a matter of survival. Faced with this threat that she has been used for ill, the “new remedy that [rises] to meet it” is none other than the “idea of an inner self,” an inner self synonymous with “concealment.” And from that moment:

Her parted lips locked themselves with the determination to be employed no longer. She would forget everything, she would repeat nothing, and when, as a tribute to the successful application of her system, she began to be called a little idiot, she tasted a pleasure new and keen. When therefore, as she grew older, her

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<sup>33</sup> As Michael McKeon, in *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005, has described, the modern domestic sphere became one of the central hubs for the development of modern notions of privacy, including the reification and support for modern individualism and autonomy, or a private sense of self. What Maisie faces, by contrast, is not a home which is the mirror and cradle of private individualism but one which is antagonistically foreign.

parents in turn announced before her that she had grown shockingly dull, it was not from any real contraction of her little stream of life. She spoiled their fun, but she practically added to her own.” (43)

Maisie claims for herself an interiority not reserved for children. She closes off porous entry by “lock[ing]” her previously “parted lips”; she rejects passivity with her “*determination* to be employed no longer”; and she defies an empty ideal by embracing its persona — acting the “idiot” to conceal her “concealment.” Again, Maisie’s parents express the conventions as to what their daughter and all daughters should be. Maisie’s “accomplishment” of “keep[ing] [her] thoughts to [herself]” becomes “just the source of her mother’s irritation.” Mrs. Farange, “liking as she did, for her own part, a child to be simple and confiding” is faced with a child anomaly of opacity, gravity, and silence (45).

Indeed, if Maisie defies the conventions of childhood, her parents just as ironically do not. The word “game” appears no fewer than twenty-five times in the novel, and only rarely does it apply directly to Maisie. Rather, it typically identifies the sinister amusements and strategies of Maisie’s parents and of Mrs. Beale. So accustomed to the “frolic menace” of adult games (53), of being played back and forth between her parents like the “little feathered shuttlecock,” or of being the center of a “frightening game,” a flirtatious “merry little scrimmage” between father and governess (53), Maisie “...from her earliest childhood, had built up in her the belief that the grown-up time was the time of real amusement...” (69). In contrast to “these persons,” who are, Maisie “disconcerting[ly]” discovers, “not of the age they ought to be,” Maisie is herself in reverse proportion not of her age either (84-85).<sup>34</sup> In the absence of parental assistance and security, Maisie becomes the central supporter and protector of the novel. In fact,

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<sup>34</sup> Pifer also notes the adult characteristics of Maisie and argues that the novel thereby collapses the gap between child and adult. This conclusion, however, does not, to my mind, account for the dematuration of the adults in the novel. In other words, it seems to me that the gap is sustained — but it is inverted.

Maisie's method for interior protection soon expands beyond the scope of self-preservation to include, most especially, the protection also of Sir Claude and Mrs Beale; and, what is more, with this wider aim, Maisie's method accrues more diverse means for its achievement, expanding beyond silence to include secrecy and diversion.

The scene where Maisie and Sir Claude cross paths with Ida and the Captain and where Maisie, diverted to occupy the latter, is alone invested with the key to this instance of her mother's infidelity is one of two which James himself offers as an exemplar of Maisie's growing ability (preface xiii-xiv). For her part, Maisie receives the secret news in the manner of confidante. The Captain, who of all the people reminds Maisie most of her "frumpy governess," Mrs. Wix, seems, like her, a bit out of place, in appearance and in character (*Notebooks* 240). Most importantly, he confesses his affair in the uncritical terms, heretofore alien to the novel and to Maisie, of love and devotion. For his own part, Sir Claude's run-in with Ida had conversely, Maisie could see, "clearly drawn blood." Thus, in the subsequent interrogation, Maisie once again determines to play the fool for the sake of peace. To his question "Well, who in the world *is* the fellow?" Maisie feels herself "flooded with prudence" and replies "Oh I haven't found out!" (133). Recalling times past when for "the ugliness of seeming disagreeable...her father, for her blankness, called her a dirty little donkey, and her mother, for her falsity, pushed her out of the room," Maisie assents to the test of "her young endurance," determines to "bear the sense of Sir Claude's displeasure," in order that she might not "feed [the] love of battle" as she had done so unwittingly in the past. For her "kept silence," which has really expanded in this instance to the level of a kept secret, Maisie faces Sir Claude's prolonged withdrawal, but this prospect of punishment:

...had not power to make her love him less; so she could not only bear it, she felt as she drove away — she could rejoice in it. It brought again the sweet sense of success that, ages before, she had had at a crisis when, on the stairs, returning from her father's, she had met a fierce question of her mother's with an imbecility as deep and had in consequence been dashed by Mrs Farange almost to the bottom. (133-134)

Because of her age, Maisie can believably play “the perfection of a dunce,” as Sir Claude proclaims her in this scene, but such a performance does not come easily to her. James insists on what Maisie chooses to “bear” with her silence as well as what she is willing to sacrifice, that is to take upon herself, for the peace and protection of others. Maisie's interiority proves far from empty in these moments. Where her silence had served to set formal boundaries between her interiority and the external threat of parental violence, in this case, it means withholding the improprieties of her mother so that Sir Claude's own emotions may be contained, so that, oddly enough, her mother may find a more permanent, virtuous happiness (with the Captain) apart from her. And in this latter instance, Maisie's withholding is self-directed. Though she is infected with the Captain's expressions of love for her mother, the picture of happiness she imagines does not include herself, so certain is she that her mother “won't have [her],” not “now” and not “in any place” (131).

Maisie is the quintessential noun made verb; from the sense of child interiority as container, she accrues the subsequent capacity to contain, an ability which, in the presence of so much ominous excess, is no longer even chiefly self-serving but which actively loans itself out, as it were, for the benefit of others. As Maisie shifts from silence to secrecy, her interiority likewise dilates to include, strangely enough, the interiorities of others. The silence that meant her failure as a messenger between her parents now means her success as a bearer of secrets for and from them. Following on the heels of the

Captain's secret confession, Maisie finds herself faced with another. With Mrs. Beale, Maisie becomes privy to the "rare secret," to the "wretched truth," which the former governess "had to confess," of frequent, clandestine meetings with Sir Claude. In a dramatic emotional display, complete with "a wonderful outbreak of tears," Mrs Beale, like so many of the adults in Maisie's life (indeed, like so many characters out of the Victorian novel), seems positively compelled to revelation. As if the secret were being literally pulled from her, James writes that she "had to bring out in a manner that seemed half an appeal, half a defiance" the startling fact that "'Well yes, hang it — I *do* see him!'" Surprising still is the concomitant revelation that Sir Claude's absence has owed something in part to his desire not to have Maisie "mixed up" in his and Mrs. Beale's sordid affairs. Nothing, in fact, could be more natural to Maisie's mind than to be thusly mixed. She does not share Sir Claude's fear of her "being compromised," since from her earliest childhood Maisie "knew as well that a person could be compromised as that a person could be slapped with a hair-brush or left alone in the dark, and it was equally familiar to her that each of these ordeals was in general held to have too little effect" (141). The passage echoes the novel's opening spoiler that though much would undoubtedly go into the tainting of Maisie's soul, "nothing ill" would yet be made of it. While the weapon of compromise has been easily wielded upon Maisie, it has not with such ease made a lasting impact. Sir Claude apparently has yet to learn what the reader and now Maisie do know which is her ability to be "in the midst" without being made "ill of."

With these "elders," then, Maisie not only detects the "overflow of their difficulties" but she frequently attempts to take the burden of difficulty from them.

Maisie resolves in this last instance to take on Sir Claude's "scruple" — willingly filling the mixed position which was, arguably, already hers — in order that she "might simplify" things for him (141). And, what's more, her abilities for detection become increasingly subtle; they become less and less reliant on that which is visible or confessed. Maisie, whose interior has developed alongside closed doors and over-laden closets, develops something of an interior line of sight, one that seeks to read the invisible word. With her "sharpened sense for latent meaning," she ever maneuvers to peer behind the curtain of the verbal and bodily gesture to register in her own thoughts the actual thoughts of others (189).<sup>35</sup> The second scene which James identifies as a particular testimony to Maisie's abilities is none other than the counter to the first. The scene with the Captain and Sir Claude is mirrored in Maisie's reunion with her father while they wait for the Countess (or, as Maisie identifies her, "Papa's Captain" (157)). After an immense absence on Beale's part, after in fact, having only accidentally come upon Maisie and his wife at the exhibition, Maisie deeply registers his "restless[ness]" sees that he needs her to help him "pretend he knew enough about her life and her education," "so well could she privately follow his difficulty in being specific to her about anything" (148-149). Beale's difficulty is a matter of his deficiency — his dependency on Maisie to help him communicate or not communicate. Taken up by Maisie, these difficulties accrue new dimensions. As Maisie mentally follows the difficulties of her father, the narrator, as closely, follows Maisie's own. In wanting nothing more than to "give a better turn to the

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<sup>35</sup> That this ability for internal perception, to see one's meaning even when that meaning is either not verbalized or is contrary to what is, is not equally shared by the adults in Maisie's life is highlighted by the further details of this late exchange between Sir Claude and Mrs. Wix. It is Maisie who follows Mrs. Wix's circuitous charge, "that there must at last be a *decent* person" in Maisie's life, as an implicit critique not of Sir Claude, who is the most immediate, visible target, but of the absent Mrs. Beale. Sir Claude, Maisie is surprised to see, misses this indirection and takes the remark as personal insult (192).



crisis,” Maisie wonders “what particular thing she could do or not do, what particular word she could speak or not speak, what particular line she could take or not take.”

Restriction is not a matter of deficiency for Maisie as it is for her father; it is rather a matter of restraint. Actively refraining has become as much of an option for her as presently acting (149).

Indeed, in the further spirit of restraint, she determines an exception; she is willing to do or not do anything but surrender Sir Claude and Mrs. Beale. In the tortured light of Maisie’s mentally considered approach, her father’s method, by contrast, reveals itself as “abrupt” and coarse. In suddenly accosting Maisie with the question of what she knows about her “brute of a mother,” Maisie notes the surprising coincidence between the subject of his question and his method of asking it, namely the resemblance between his abruptness and her mother’s similar manner of “free flight.” And from this recognition, moreover, she gains a new “inspiration.” She proclaims, ““Oh yes, I know everything!”” feeling “pressingly, that the more she should be able to say about mamma the less she would be called upon to speak of her step-parents.” As before, Maisie’s aim is fundamentally protective, though her means have grown significantly more complex than the days of mute irresponse. And, as usual, it comes at the cost of an immense effort, an immense exchange. Where Maisie’s silent method had posed a visibly apparent resistance to her parents own method of unencumbered speech and expected transparency, Maisie’s inspiration in this instance is contrary only on the subterranean level. Here, instead of locking her lips, Maisie must try to keep them moving. On the surface, her exclamation, “Oh I know everything,” followed by the ensuing revelation of her Kensington Garden encounter, hyperbolically mirrors the excessive, compulsory

revelations of mother and father. But, in reality, Maisie's inspiration is one which practically merges her options of speaking and not speaking. In short, she is inspired by the idea of a diversion. Where she had kept the secret about the Captain in order to protect Sir Claude, here she reveals it precisely to the same end.

Neither Maisie's method nor her selfless intent are mirrored in her father who, with his plans for an American voyage with the Countess, is most fearful of his own exposure and of the child as the presumably uninhibited agent thereof. Beale makes a show of inviting Maisie to attend them on their voyage but quickly assumes her refusal, thus enabling him to preen: "You can't say I don't put it before you — you can't say I ain't kind to you or that I don't play fair. Mind you never say that, you know." By his warning, Beale reveals his own "limited consciousness." Throughout their conversation, Beale's interests prove one-sided. The narrator marks "a dryness in the way Beale replied [to Maisie] that it didn't matter what she thought," a failure of conscientiousness in her presence, the way he begins "to smoke in her face," and last but not least his difficulties with Maisie, insistently described as "awkward," "foolish," "flounder[ing]," "clumsy," and "so stupid all through" (148-149). Maisie's growth has been unmarked by him. Like her mother who, at the inception of her silent method, read silence as imbecility, he takes hers to be a transparent, literal consciousness. Literally, he places the offer before her and in so doing thinks he insures her properly reporting it as such. In actuality, it takes only for Beale to rub "his beard against her cheek" "in the most inconsequent way in the world," and Maisie

understood as well as if he had spoken it that what he wanted, hang it, was that she should let him off with all the honours — with all the appearance of virtue and sacrifice on his side. It was exactly as if he had broken out to her: 'I say, you little booby, help me to be irreproachable, to be noble, and yet to have none of the

beastly bore of it. There's only impropriety enough for one of us; so *you* must take it all. (153)

In addition to the familiar metaphors of empty and boundless receptacles, fun and amusing shuttlecocks, of transparent minds and transparent houses, it is as if we can now add religious confessional to the list. For in this scene and in the prior scenes — with the Captain and with Mrs Beale — it is truly as if Maisie's interiority has become a space for the sordid to unload their burdens of sin and to imagine themselves as wholly absolved by the exchange. In a manner at last wholly unconventional, Maisie's various parental figures see her interiority not as a source for moral solutions but rather as a repository for unwanted complications. In a very real and most ironic sense, Maisie's interiority becomes for them a problem safe, a space where they can displace and store their troubles such that they can continue to travel through life unfettered.

### **The Divided Child and the Emergence of Modernist Fiction:**

But if there can be a development more striking than this parental strategy for the manipulation of the child, it is the child's comprehension of it. James enters Beale's thoughts in this instance not through the means of an omniscient or even attendant narrator but through the "expanding consciousness" of Maisie (preface vi). It is she, with her ever-more subtle interior sight, who bypasses manifest expression to perceive the latent uses her father would make of her. Maisie's insight is also a type of meta-sight where what she perceives is none other than her father's perception of her: as container, as confessional, as scapegoat — as someone to "take...all" impropriety and leave him ironically innocent. But, in point of fact, this meta-comprehension is not new to Maisie, for from the start, her silent method was borne out of her distinct awareness that she was being made "a messenger of insult." Thus, Maisie surpasses the adult figurations of her as

container (whether conventional or no) by the mere fact that they become part of the very thing she contains. By implication, what Maisie bears, and indeed she ever bears more and more, is not so important as how she bears it. In contrast to her “elders” who predictably prove unable to think beyond their own self-interest, whose single-mindedness defines an adult method that is quintessentially abrupt, that is relentlessly revealing, Maisie’s method splits upon her core objectives of peace and protection, strategically giving and withholding by turns.

“Nothing was less new to Maisie,” we are told by the end of this sequence, “than the art of not thinking singly” (176). The weight of James’s diction as applied to Maisie, and as otherwise to the adults in her life, falls on the side of consistency. Where silence and secrecy spoke to Maisie’s as a divided and segmentable consciousness capable of adapting to the demands of the moment, the proposition here is of a child consciousness cemented in division. More than the suggestion of stability and indeed durability — “nothing” being “less new” to Maisie than this form of consciousness — James insists too that Maisie has honed this way of thinking into an “art.” In the place of the familiar metaphors of childhood, James identifies a new child interiority that is mobile, multiple, restrained, and perhaps most especially, authorial. In the preface, he links the child’s interiority with a new craft, with the narrative method of a new type of novel and with a new metaphor too. He describes Maisie in navigational terms as a ship, as his “light vessel of consciousness, swaying in such a draught” yet “sowing on barren strands, through the mere fact of presence, the seed of moral life.” In rough waters, with “faculties...well shaken up,” James constructs his child craft “without extravagance” as a “light vessel,” as a “slip of a girl,” and yet also “invest[s] her with perceptions easily and

almost infinitely quickened.” Thus “fitted out,” he concludes, the child “vessel of consciousness” “might well see me through the whole course of my design” (viii). The metaphor of Maisie as a vessel of navigation and narration, as opposed to as boundless receptacle or even as house, emphasizes hers as a nomadic and capable existence. Hers is a subjectivity in motion, belonging to no land, belonging to no person. Early on, it occurs to her that “if it had become... a question of sides,” she “was on nobody’s” (93). Feeling ever “unclaimed,” (69) Maisie is always “in the midst” of circumstance but she is also always “detach[ed]” (159) from it, autonomous to the hold it might otherwise have. With her, James imagines, as Shakespeare did not, being able to oppose “a sea of troubles” and yet keep one’s head safely above water. As ship, the child consciousness of Maisie is surrounded by an ocean of problems, and yet she floats, detached, through them and over them, and with her so goes the novel.

Yet if James imagines Maisie’s as a free-floating and self-sufficient interiority, he also imagines it with limits. Indeed, from a narrative perspective, James’s first epiphany with Maisie is “to make and to keep her so limited consciousness the very field of [his] picture” (preface ix). With typographical verve, James emphasizes the idea at the point of discovery: “EVERYTHING TAKES PLACE BEFORE MAISIE. That is a part of the essence of the thing—that, with the tenderness she inspires, the rest of the essence, the second of the golden threads of my *form*” (*Notebooks* 238). But, what I term James’s first epiphany with *Maisie* would by many, if not most, be termed “the” epiphany of the novel’s narrative design. Nearly all who seek clues to the fulfillment of the apparently unfulfilled promise of the novel’s title, to identity the “what” of *What Maisie Knew*, rest on Maisie’s consciousness as a limited, partial register of events. There are readings

which focus, for instance, strictly on what Maisie actually sees and/or on what she actually, physically feels as being the central line of the novel and, usually too, as being the key to the riddle of her knowledge.<sup>36</sup> There are readings which determine that there is more, because of her limitations, that Maisie, in fact, does not know than the other way around and interpret the title, therefore, ironically.<sup>37</sup> While all of these readings fail to appreciate Maisie's appreciation for absence (for silence and secrecy), they all hold up better in the novel's first half than in the second, where Maisie comes to know more and more what is "latent," comes to understand more and more what is not presented to her.

The full sense of this accumulation is clearly visible in the scene following that between Maisie and her father at the Countess's where, it will be recalled, Maisie not only "follow[s] his difficult[ies]" in speaking to her, but through a mere brush of his beard, osmosis-like, registers his unspoken thoughts in her own mind (in the very terms no less than he would speak them, if speak them he had). In the next chapter Maisie is taken with Sir Claude to Folkestone, and, en route, realizes a change in her own mental habits. It has always been the case with her, she thinks, that "to be with Sir Claude was to think of Sir Claude"; however, somehow, her thoughts have now turned from presence to absence. Now, with Sir Claude-without-Mrs. Beale, what presents itself "into her dizzy

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<sup>36</sup> John C. McCloskey in "What Maisie Knew: A Study of Childhood and Adolescence," *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 36.4 (1965): 485-513 argues that Maisie's is a traceable empirical development with a very restricted environment. Jeff Westover traces Maisie's as a path from passive dependence to active autonomy through the novel's various physical laying on of hands in "Handing Over Power in James's *What Maisie Knew*," *Style* 28.2 (1994): 201-218. And Christina Britzolakis's brilliant analysis of the phantasmagoric qualities of Maisie's vision nonetheless restricts Maisie's perception to literal sight, arguing that there remains throughout the novel a fundamental disjunct between what Maisie physically sees and what she cognitively understands (383-384).

<sup>37</sup> Susan E. Honeyman argues that the inaccessibility of childhood is precisely what allows James to develop his late method, a method which dramatized the novel's struggle with representation in "What Maisie Knew and the Impossible Representation of Childhood," *The Henry James Review* 22.1 (2001): 67-80. And Dennis Foster, "Maisie Supposed to Know: Amo(u)ral Analysis," *Henry James Review* 5.3 (1984): 207-216, challenges the basic assumption that Maisie knows anything at all by showing that Maisie more often than not takes up the language of the adults around her in an attempt to please and impress them without really understanding the words themselves.

head” is the “long-lost image of Mrs Wix.” “It was singular,” James writes, “but from this time she understood and she followed, followed with the sense of an ample-filling out of any void created by symptoms of avoidance and of flight” (162). Really, the old governess has done nothing less than Maisie has done her whole novelistic life — she has removed herself, detached herself from the situation in order that she might have a better affect on it. She has worked on Sir Claude the importance, as Maisie has already learned, of restraint, of sacrifice. He must give up Mrs. Beale for “the real good of the little unfortunate.”<sup>38</sup> From her own method of detachment, Maisie comes to appreciate and understand it in others. The narrator underscores the significance of the scene with the acknowledgement that though “Maisie had known all along a great deal,” she never knew “so much as she was to know from this moment on...” (162).

What begins as an exploration of the child’s as a limited, partial comprehension of her world expands over the course of the novel to signify a consciousness restrained and recognizing restraint, an interiority divided and limited by choice rather than by necessity. Many scholars have noted that *What Maisie Knew* is an emergently modernist novel and many others have noted that James’s new novelistic method, one which centers itself on individual consciousness, begins with *Maisie*, and many have noted that this method (whether they attribute it to *Maisie* or not) is at the very forefront of what takes shape as the modernist novel, but none, so far as I know, has given Maisie her full due by unifying these separate observations in one.<sup>39</sup> Together, they illuminate the link between

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<sup>38</sup> The line explicitly echoes the earlier expression that Maisie’s parents should do something for ““the real good, don’t you know?” of the child” (42); In that instance the expression proves a lie for as “any spectator” of the proceedings could see, Maisie’s parents “wanted her not for any good they could do her, but for the harm they could, with her unconscious aid, do each other” (36). The second such manifestation, though not false, nonetheless proves equally futile, at least with Sir Claude as the agent of the child’s good.

<sup>39</sup> Walter Isle, in *Experiments in Form: Henry James’s Novels, 1896-1901* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968) identifies the cluster of shorter texts that James wrote following his failure in the

modernist revisions of childhood interiority and the emergence of modernist fiction. To confront the conventions of nineteenth-century literature is to confront the conventions of childhood, so seeped is one in the other. Innocence, simplicity, transparency, sentimentality, morality — all are not only deeply seated in the concept of the child but all find permanent and renewed life in the idea of an infinitely preservable, infinitely porous childhood interior.

The nineteenth-century novel, for modernists, becomes synonymous with sentimental, revelatory, and literal voluminous excess. The modernist novel, by contrast, develops an early attachment to the inexplicable, the restrained, and the strictly and uniquely formed. Maisie's "limited consciousness" in its composite manifestations premiers and epitomizes each of these modernist interests, to resist the old and to write the new. Neither version of her limitation alone accomplishes this feat so much as the tension between the two. Though James challenges the conventions of childhood from the novel's outset, his title and his epistemological method for much of the novel promise, at the very least, a Victorian ending: a most satisfying revelation, as to what, however unexpected or sinister, Maisie at last does know. The novel drives home as its central purpose the following of Maisie's "expanding consciousness," and thereby seems to guarantee that Maisie's initially "limited consciousness" will be finally unlimited; she will know what should, by the conventions of her age, be offlimits, and we, as readers of

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theatre as experimental and as the direct precursors of the "involutions and obscurities" of James's "so-called 'late style'" (11). Sergio Perosa, in his *Henry James and the Experimental Novel* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978), agrees with Isle and draws a further distinction between the thematic experiments in James's fiction pre-1890 and the technical experimentation, the merging of his interest in the dramatic method with a new limited point of view, central to his novelistic endeavors immediately following his failure in the theatre (5-6). And most recently Christina Britzolakis argues that *What Maisie Knew* serves as an "'experimental' precursor of modernism" as well in that it "constitutes a key moment in the refinement, specialization, and elaboration of a technique of fictional looking devised to negotiate the shocks of urban modernity" (370).



her, will know what that something is. And yet at the moment of Maisie's most dramatic intake of knowledge, at the moment when Maisie's own methods of absence are echoed in Mrs. Wix's strategy of "avoidance and flight," the narrator interrupts the revelatory trajectory. He interrupts and he fast-forwards both at once, proclaiming with regard to this newfound knowledge, that "I shall have no room for the goal if I attempt to trace the stages." This professment not only arrests the momentum of the scene, not only wrests the narrative line from Maisie's consciousness to the narrator's own, but most importantly begs the question as to what has been the goal after all if not to trace the stages of Maisie's knowledge (162).

That there might be another goal to *Maisie* is suggested by the novel's general failure to ever identify what Maisie in fact knew. The last thoughts are of Mrs. Wix expressing that that line of inquiry at last has no goal, has no end, for there is "still . . . room," she felt, "for wonder at what Maisie knew" (266). To the extent that there is any satisfaction via this ending, it is not the satisfaction of revelation but of tautology, of having arrived precisely where the novel began. What is interesting in this moment, in fact, is not what it reveals but the manner in which it does not reveal. It was one thing for the attendant narrator to divert the narrative line from the consciousness of Maisie in the scene last discussed, but it is another thing to follow in its stead the consciousness of Mrs. Wix. To supplant with her "wonder" the wonder of the child. In a novel that prefaces itself with the absolute epiphany that "EVERYTHING TAKES PLACE BEFORE MAISIE" the last line manifests a striking exception, following as it does "the sidelong look" of Mrs. Wix, neglecting the look *from* Maisie to look *at* her instead. If one has taken as central to the novel the threads of tracing the child's epistemological growth and

of following her “limited consciousness” “through the course of [the novel’s] design,” then this will likely seem an ending to a different novel. What most bothered reviewers in James’s own time about the novel was its failure to meet expectations, not only according to nineteenth-century conventions but according to James’s own novelistic reputation. Its style is described as “labyrinthine” in the place of James’s “earlier” (and one also senses more welcome) “lucidity.”<sup>40</sup> It is, one reviewer writes, a “bewildering blur of motive and action which has the same effect of irritation on the mind as an ill-focused photograph upon the sight.”<sup>41</sup> Caroline Levine has recovered for Victorian literature what she terms “the serious pleasures of suspense” or the way in which Victorian fiction often unsettled its readers’ expectations in order to make room for unconventional thought. However, even Levine acknowledges that the Victorian reader, however willing to subject herself to the mental rigors of suspense, nonetheless expected and was satisfied to receive the gift at the end of the novel of its theretofore closely-guarded secrets.<sup>42</sup> For reviewers of *Maisie*, James constructed a new frustration, a difficult novel without any apparent reward. “To read ‘What Maisie Knew,’ one reviewer writes, “is to go through an experience almost or quite as remarkable as that of his unfortunate little heroine.” For him, the “author’s cynical refusal to answer the conundrum in the propounding of which he has used up every one of his 470 pages” produces the inevitable question as to whether the difficulty of reading the novel has, after all, been “worth while?”<sup>43</sup>

*Maisie’s* is a modernist ending not only for what it refuses in terms of readerly insight but for the manner of its refusal. What it promises with one hand it denies with the

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<sup>40</sup> “Some Tendencies in Contemporary Fiction,” *The Living Age* 223.2891 (Dec 2, 1891): 587.

<sup>41</sup> “The Novels of Mr. Henry James,” *The Living Age* 236.3061 (Mar 7, 1903): 578.

<sup>42</sup> Caroline Levine, *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt* (Charlottesville, VA: The University of Virginia Press, 2003) 2.

<sup>43</sup> “Henry James’s New Work: ‘What Maisie Knew,’” BR9

other, and in fact the denial is more sharply felt because of the original promise. And in this way it is a novel which is as internally divided as its central character. The narrator, created by James, to follow Maisie's consciousness and to fill in the inevitable "gaps and voids" of the young child's perception, who initially "attends and amplifies" her vision (preface ix-x), increasingly, from the moments leading up to Maisie's "crossing" into Paris to her return voyage with Mrs. Wix at the novel's close, finds himself separated from her.<sup>44</sup>

The moment at which this narrative break carves itself most sharply is an earlier scene with Maisie and Mrs Wix at the *plage*. Mrs. Wix has repeated her question to Maisie as to her having or not having "absolutely" any "moral sense," to which Maisie makes a mute reply, silently communicating, with their "quite conjoined apprehension," the truth, "since they must face it," that she indeed possesses "absolutely and appallingly . . . little." James continues:

This marked more particularly the moment of the child's perceiving that her friend had risen to a level which might—till superseded at all events—pass almost for sublime. Nothing more remarkable had taken place in the first heat of her own departure, no act of perception less to be overtraced by our rough method, than her vision, the rest of that Boulogne day, of the manner in which she figured. I so despair of courting her noiseless mental footsteps here that I must crudely give you my word for its being from this time forward a picture literally present to her. Mrs Wix saw her as a little person knowing so extraordinarily much that, for the account to be taken of it, what she still didn't know would be ridiculous if it hadn't been embarrassing. (212)

Alongside Maisie, Mrs Wix's is a figure, a consciousness, that has risen to new heights.

Now, the narrator juggles her consciousness along with Maisie's. In noting their

"conjoined apprehension," he prefigures the difficulty in this passage of separating theirs

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<sup>44</sup> Barbara Eckstein in her "Unsquaring the Squared Root of *What Maisie Knew*," *The Henry James Review* 9.3 (1988): 177-187, makes a persuasive argument for narrative ambivalence in *Maisie*, based to large extent, on the narrator's restricted, humanly deficient omniscience.

into individual consciousnesses. In addition to getting another instance of what Mrs Wix “saw” as opposed to and in addition to what Maisie sees, for the implication is that this is another instance of Maisie seeing what others see in her, there is also a crucial uncertainty as to who is being “figure[d]” in this most “remarkable” event of Maisie’s Parisian sojourn. Is the remarkable figuration Mrs Wix’s new sublime position in Maisie’s eyes or is it an instance where Maisie, once more, epiphanically perceives the way in which she herself has figured in the lives of others?

Coming at the end of a sentence with multiple “her”s, clearly referring to Maisie, following a sentence which as clearly magnifies the stature of the old governess, the “she” of “the manner in which she figured” is tortuously ambiguous. Purposefully so, it seems, for as the narrator nicely acknowledges, confusion has a way of compounding itself in this passage. And yet the confusion also has a way of communicating. As a product of convergence, the ambiguities of this moment reveal in part the difficulties of the narrator meeting Maisie, of his being able to follow and understand her at this late point in her epistemological development. In a sense, the difficulty speaks to Maisie’s growth, to her having even surpassed the frame that initially contained her as one with knowable, pre-set limits, as one whose destiny could be summed up from the very first as childhood epitaph and resistant goodness. In contrast to much that has come before, the narrator in this instance turns from confessing for Maisie to confessing for himself. His method is “rough,” his means “despair[ing],” his word “crude.” Coming as it does at the close of a novel where the narrator has consistently amplified Maisie’s consciousness, from its earliest misapprehensions, to its growing silences, secrets, and diversions, this is

a striking recognition of a fundamental role reversal, for here it is the narrator, not Maisie, who is self-professedly limited.

But in another sense, the difficulty speaks to the growth of the novel through Maisie. Though it separates from Maisie's interiority, though it "traces" that interiority rather than revealing its contents, the novel that bears Maisie's name comes also to employ her method. Detracting from the narrator's "despair of courting [Maisie's] noiseless mental footsteps" is the nearly simultaneous salesmanship that yet promises knowledge and insight into her. In another telling first person intervention, the narrator "crudely give[s]" us "[his] word for its being from this time forward a picture literally present to her, where the "its" and the "picture" are at once guaranteed but undisclosed. Whether through "tracing" or fast-forwarding, the directive in both instances seems to be nothing less than the overwriting of the child interior in favor of the child's method for sustaining the interior as such. Maisie's silences, secrecies, diversions and all of her various withholdings find a second life in the form of their telling, or not telling as the case comes at last to be. As Ida was faced with an unconventional child who by her silence refused to be "simple and confiding" so the reader of *Maisie* comes to face an unconventional novel that frustrates for precisely the same reasons and in precisely the same ways. James's narrator, in despairing over his inability to follow Maisie's presumably advanced thinking, claims an imbecility in this last scene matched only by Maisie's silent ploys before him. In ever concealing what he knows or does not know, he proves able to keep a secret as well as she. In shifting to the consciousness of Mrs. Wix and what she sees or does not see in Maisie, he diverts from the novelistic object no less than has Maisie with her exchange of the Captain's secret for Sir Claude's.

Readings which have persisted in either perceiving a hidden revelation in the ending of *Maisie* or in continuing to seek clues for some such, often, I believe, have in their periphery a nineteenth-century novel ideal. To read *Maisie* or *Maisie's* knowledge as the center of the novel, as obvious as that will no doubt seem to many, is not unproblematic, arising as it does from a basic novelistic assumption that places character and plot at the forefront of that genre's interests. But these are the very priorities which the modernist novel frequently seeks to destabilize and disorder. From the novel's midpoint to now, from just before *Maisie's* "crossing" to this beach scene, the suggestion of the narrator has been, despite all prior appearances, that there is a different goal for the novel, one not centered on the stages of *Maisie's* knowledge, one not even centered on that knowledge itself. What *Maisie* surmises at the end of this scene is "that if her whole history, for Mrs Wix, had been the successive stages of her knowledge, so the very climax of the concatenation would, in the same view, be the stage at which the knowledge would overflow" (212-213). *Maisie* at last sees what the novel itself has seemed heretofore to be, the tracing of "the successive stages of her knowledge"; I say "seemed" because now, through *Maisie*, the narrator projects this narrative line onto the traditionally-minded caretaker. It is Mrs. Wix who would turn *Maisie's* "history" into the cup that runneth over, that would map its story onto the familiar overflowings *Maisie* has already encountered. Such is not, it is implied, the history of *Maisie* that the narrator would tell, and it is certainly not, *Maisie's* anxiety reveals, the history she wishes for herself.

What begins as one of the first realist depictions of child psychology, one of the first imaginings of a childhood interiority belonging to the child (rather than to the

nostalgic adult), comes to resist at last the ends of the maturational, which is also the epistemological, trajectory. In contrast to the “inevitability” of the well-trod path to knowledge which Mrs. Wix and even the reader anticipate, the novel yet resists overflowing revelation, for rather than follow Maisie’s consciousness down that “road to know Everything,” the narrator follows instead the contours of her method (213). This is not to say, however that the two, method and consciousness, are unrelated. In following Maisie’s method, by which I mean both tracing and imitating, James activates a feedback mechanism, whereby what is not revealed cannot have overflowed. Such also has the effect, therefore, of pressing at the limits of verisimilitude; rather than imitate life, James imitates form and thereby suggests a new life, a new subjectivity in the form of a modernist child. To follow Maisie’s method is to control and conceal (the two are nearly synonymous concepts for James) an interior which is the novel’s no less than the child’s, and it is to set Maisie firmly within the landscape of fiction.

Many are tempted because of Maisie’s growth within the novel to view her as a person, as a real child, but the novel itself increasingly pushes Maisie into the realm of art. Maisie, by yet another development in her method, defies once more the weight of compounding expectations. To Sir Claude who proposes that Maisie “give [Mrs Wix] up,” to Mrs Wix who expects that she will have, with her newfound moral sense, refused such a request, to Mrs Beale who expects just as strongly the reverse, to them all Maisie’s response is novel and strange: it comes in the form of a “condition.” Maisie makes her now familiar sacrifices contingent upon another’s. She will sacrifice her relationship with Mrs Wix if Sir Claude will reciprocate in kind by giving up Mrs Beale. The merger between Maisie’s method and the novel’s is registered by Sir Claude who sees that her

response has defied ordinary probability and has instead been “set down among them like a work of art” (262). And like a modernist work of art, Maisie’s method, whether through her silences, secrets, diversions, or now, conditions, helps to separate her from, rather than connect her to, her surrounding order. At the close of this scene, Maisie is “again dropped and divided,” but as Sir Claude attests, being so dropped and being so divided can in the given context mean a new kind of freedom, a freedom in this case from the unencumbered, unconditional (261). In the notebooks and in the preface James insisted that Maisie would be “rescue[d],” (*Notebooks* 240), that “the small expanding consciousness would have to be saved” (preface vi-vii). To his contemporaries and to mine, no expression could be more common than “saving the child,” but what James seeks to save is, as with Maisie’s own efforts, wholly other to expectation. Saving children, past and present, has typically meant “saving them for the enjoyment of childhood”: warding them off from experience, from exploitation, from responsibility and encapsulating them in a space and time of simplicity, innocence, freedom, and play (Cunningham 137). But for James no one plays more or is more singular or more free than *Maisie*’s adult society. To save the divided child is to keep her, in part, from succumbing to singularity, to preserve hers as the unconventional interior of art, if not someday of life.

It is a hallmark of the post-Romantic child that it is conceived in opposition to adulthood but the purpose of that conception is to counter the perceived pressures and corruptions of modernity. Childhood becomes the key to human interiority because it becomes the key to history, to a reified past, at once individual and cultural. James’s child is no less opposed to a corrupt adult order but the purpose of her opposition is distinctly



contrary to this, is distinctly modernist, for she is the bearer of the unconventional. She offers not the preservation of a lost past, or a suspension of reality, or a host for tradition-keeping; hers is a consciousness of the simultaneous present, thinking both the what is and the what is not of the given moment, becoming even thusly simultaneous, to be present in the midst of reality's excesses and contingencies and to be absent from them too, to be there and to not be there: to be divided and to be detached. Where Pater sought to preserve the child in the house and the home in the child through his insistence on memorial re-entry, James protects the child as domestic labyrinth, as closet, as ship in a sea of troubles.

The "*partagé* child," the child of divorce, for him embodies the "art of not thinking singly." James's form, the form of a developing modernist fiction, emerges out of the reconceptualization of hers. Because of the weight of expectations placed on the conceptual child, thinking differently, creating difficulty, is through her no great feat. She has ever had in this environment, James realizes from the memories of his own childhood, the capacity to make or not make scenes as she chose. The slightest "turn of the screw" (a phrase which James uses for the first time in *Maisie*) with regard to her is capable of producing the most dramatic, ironic effect. The slightest turn of the screw — to imagine of the child container a child capable of containment — to imagine of her interiority an interior withheld from sight and capable of withholding, is to turn the conventional order outside-in, so to speak, to defy the push to revelation, the will to porous entry and re-entry, and the satisfaction of overflowing excess. As Maisie seeks to contain this excess in others, dividing her already divided interior in order to make room for the interiors of others, so too does the novel divide itself upon her, creating an ever-

increasing split consciousness. The narrator that initially “attends and amplifies” Maisie’s consciousness ends by corroborating its disassociation and containment. Her method becomes his; her form becomes the form of the emergently modernist novel. From her earliest realization of an “inner self, or in other words the idea of concealment,” one can dimly discern on the dim horizon, a modernist figure, the inheritor of the child and her novel’s newly locked lips.

## Chapter Two:

### A Suspect Innocence: *The Turn of the Screw*, *Nightwood*, and the History of Modernism

‘The way I flew! Do you know, Jane, I sometimes wonder whether I ever did really fly.’  
 . . . ‘Why can’t you fly now, mother?’  
 ‘Because I am grown up, dearest. When people grow up they forget the way.’  
 ‘Why do they forget the way?’  
 ‘Because they are no longer gay and innocent and heartless. It is only the gay and innocent and heartless who can fly.’ (Barrie, 148)

Though Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) preceded even the earliest incarnation of *Peter Pan*<sup>1</sup> and though Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood* (1936) appeared decades after either of these, I offer Wendy’s unsettling sentiment at the end of *Peter and Wendy* (1911) as a well-known, condensed introduction to a recurring modernist problem: the problem of the eternal child and its associative undying innocence. Wendy’s grown-up longing marks an unconventional modern departure not because she yearns to be young again (for what yearning could be more modern than this?) but because her longing is only partially nostalgic, naming both the wonders and the deficits of youth. The heartlessness of childhood is repeatedly inscribed in J.M. Barrie’s text: from Peter’s first “cunning” seduction of Wendy away from her London home, to the tragic sorrow of Mrs. Darling, haunted by thoughts of her most thoughtless children (the narrator offers his opinion that they do not deserve even to have the window open for their return), to that sorrow’s rebirth in Wendy, who anticipates spring cleaning reunions nearly always lost on the most thoughtless, most forgetful of them all, Peter. One cannot have a heart

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Pan was first introduced within J.M. Barrie’s 1902 adult novel *The Little White Bird*. *Peter Pan*, the play, emerged in 1904; *Peter and Wendy*, the children’s book, did not appear until 1911.

for what one cannot remember, and adults, as Wendy and her mother before her prove, have full minds and heavy hearts. Despite the colossal misreading that is the now iconic Peter Pan (the lighthearted —not heartless— boy who never grows up) the narrator's and Wendy's embedded criticisms of Peter suggest that there may be something less than ideal in the child object of this modern mass idolatry.<sup>2</sup>

Flanking *Peter Pan*, *The Turn of the Screw* and *Nightwood* present an even darker modernist picture of the too-idealized child. There is a modicum of safety in *Peter Pan* — in the utter distinctions between child and adult, between London and Neverland, safety even in knowing that Peter is an exception, not the rule: “All children, except one, grow up.” So goes the famous first line. But there are no such boundaries in the novel-societies of James and Barnes. For one, childhood is not removed to a far-off place with far-off features; rather, it is “in the midst” and embroiled with adult life. The children of *Nightwood* become themselves “strange” members of the novel's night society of charlatans, inverters, and circus aficionados. Flora, Miles, and the governess make for yet another “odd trio” (to take a phrase from Barnes). At Bly they are, as the governess believes, “united in [their] danger,” but they are also, as the story reveals in its unfolding, distinctly endangered by their union. For another, childhood is no more off limits to the adults in these texts than adult society is to the child.

The governess (for James) and Robin Vote (for Barnes) resonate with the implications of extended youth. At the forefront of modernist resistance, *The Turn of the*

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<sup>2</sup> Jacqueline Rose has studied the alterations which popular adaptations of *Peter Pan* have made to Barrie's original versions, particularly in the way these adaptations have tended to erase the role of *Peter and Wendy's* ambivalent narrator. But even critics are not immune to the idolization of Peter; James Kincaid's otherwise engaging interpretation of the child in history holds the line on Peter's as a model of child innocence universally and wholly (by Barrie and by society at large) desired (113). Proceeding on two fronts, Karen Coats counters Kincaid's thesis that Peter exemplifies the empty-ideal of modern “Child-Loving” with the argument that Peter's is really a figure of plenitude, whose lack of a lack actually makes him increasingly a target for Victorian “child-hating.”

*Screw* brings the nineteenth-century dream of childhood and innocent immortality to experimental, horrifying fruition. *The Turn of the Screw* imagines an innocence unbounded, loosed in the double sense first of a liberation from its historically youthful host and second in its expanding capacity for meanings. There are not one but many innocences in *The Turn of the Screw* just as there are potentially not one but many innocents, including the adult governess who comes to compete in the field of innocence along with — and indeed against — her child charges. In this narrative hybrid — part fairytale, part ghost story — James continues the modernist method he began in *What Maisie Knew*. Explicitly inspired by the fairy tale, with a formal brevity and imaginative fullness at cross-purposes with one another, and implicitly inspired by the nineteenth-century audience for that genre, James weds the fairy tale with the *tabula rasa* to create a story which narrates the unknown, which plays novelistic host to its own series of imaginatively provocative “blanks.” In the most modernist fashion, the form of *The Turn of the Screw* is a form contrary to content, suggesting far more, through these “blanks,” than it ever actually says; and it is a form, too, which is resistant to content. On the one hand, James’s form, disciplined and slight, turns the screw to tighten; on the other, the story of an innocence that will not die turns the screw otherwise, loosening its hold on the child, the natural, and the moral good.

At the other end of the modernist timeline, Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood* picks up in many ways where *The Turn of the Screw* leaves off. Just as James contributed to the emergence of modernist fiction, Barnes played her part in writing that period’s aesthetic decline. In *Nightwood* the problem of adult innocence is not just a concern for human interiority but it is also now a concern for art, for modernism itself. By 1936, it would

seem that modernism's formal alliance with certain tropes of youth has not only run its course — it has gone too far. Modernism's love affair with the new has been linked to youthful resistance, to experimentation, and to innovation, but it can, from another angle, be viewed as a cooptation of innocence as unbounded and “heartless” as the nineteenth-century colonization of childhood ever was. The central figure of *Nightwood*, Robin Vote, is not only repeatedly cast in the mold of the “perpetual” child, she is also always a work of art, an invitation to creation, a blank canvas, and a picture. Robin is the hypothetical child of modernism, offering not innocence but its artifice, not substance but its empty form. Her representation is perhaps more beautiful, perhaps more full of blank possibilities, but Robin is the center of *Nightwood*'s widening gyre because she is as a beacon of dispossession to the already dispossessed.

The story of *The Turn of the Screw* is an important predecessor to *Nightwood*, but more importantly the form of *The Turn of the Screw* is at the heart of what *Nightwood* would represent and revise. The immense connection and the immense separation between these two texts is a central part of the story this chapter seeks to tell. Together they establish the enduring role of childhood interiority for the continued development of the modernist aesthetic; apart they reveal just how precisely modernism was framed by this association. Just as James helps to illuminate, at its beginning, the potential for modernism of a resistant method and consciousness forged out of childhood, so does Barnes work to concede, near its close, the limits for modernism of that method.

## I *The Turn of the Screw* and the Question of Innocence

In the notebooks and in the preface, James describes two primary generic frames for *The Turn of the Screw*.<sup>3</sup> One is the ghost-story that James actually hears, told by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1895. The story James records regards the corruption of young children left to the care of “wicked and depraved” servants. The servants die and seek to haunt the children. The children’s only hope of being saved (of not being lost) is to be kept from “coming over to where they are” (112). This ghost-story, minus the crucial role of the governess, becomes the basic plot of *The Turn of the Screw*. The other, far less obvious, generic influence is the fairy tale. In the preface, James compares *The Turn of the Screw* to Blue-Beard and Cinderella. Like the fairy tale, *The Turn of the Screw* represents for James “an excursion into chaos while remaining, like Blue-Beard and Cinderella, but an anecdote” (125). The form is “compact,” highly contained; the content is wildly “improvise[d],” “chaos” (124-125).

*The Turn of the Screw* is a ghost story, and it is a fairy tale. Shared at a late night gathering, like any good ghost story, the tale centers on a manuscript written by a governess about her first assignment, an account she has since entrusted to Douglas, the brother of a later charge, who many years later entrusts its contents to the novella’s narrator. The bulk of *The Turn of the Screw* is given over to the relation of this manuscript which tells, from the governess’s point of view, of her strange assignment to take sole responsibility for the two orphan children, Miles and Flora, at their uncle’s isolated and abandoned country estate. Bly, at first, is picturesque and its child residents are, at first, cherubic. Together they launch the governess’s story as a fairy tale in the

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<sup>3</sup> All of my citations from *The Turn of the Screw*, the notebooks and the preface pertaining to it, come from the Norton Critical Edition of the text.

making. But the governess's (and the children's) time at Bly is short-lived for she relates how she discovers that the estate is haunted, and more terrifying, how she comes to realize that the apparitions there have nefarious designs on the children, how she subsequently attempts to shield and protect them, and how, most terrifying of all, she comes to suspect that the children have been in cahoots all along with these figures of evil. *The Turn of the Screw* is a fairy tale turned ghost story, therefore, not merely because of the evil spirits that intrude upon Bly's dreamscape but because childhood and innocence shift, and turn, and return to haunt the governess and the narrative as a whole.

On the heels of *What Maisie Knew*, *The Turn of the Screw* continues James's fictional fascination with the problem of childhood interiority, and it continues likewise the translation of those conventionally pivotal elements of childhood into the emergence of those unconventionally pivotal elements of modernist form.<sup>4</sup> Where it is Maisie's limited consciousness that becomes the template for *What Maisie Knew*'s own method of conscious restraint, here it is the child's presumed innocence that becomes the model for James's own, new "blank" method. "My values," James writes in the preface to the New York Edition of *The Turn of the Screw*, "are positively all blanks." The key to this new, blank method is to turn over the work of narrative specificity to the imagination of the individual reader: "Make him *think* the evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications" (128). From the child subject in both cases, James

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<sup>4</sup> I am far from alone in recognizing the problem of the child as a pattern in James's work of this period. Maeve Pearson describes the "paradox of children's privacy" as a "major preoccupation for James in the 1880s" (106), and Pearson herself cites Ellen Pifer's claim that *What Maisie Knew* and *The Turn of the Screw* in particular "reflect" James's "problematic" and, indeed, "ambivalent" "image of the child" (24). Leon Edel includes *The Turn of the Screw* in what he calls "the most curious series of novels James devised in his entire career as a writer," a series which enters "a terrible world of blighted houses and of blighted childhoods..." (*The Treacherous Years* 168). So many of James's writings (in the multi-generic sense) exemplify this "curious" interest, among them: "The Pupil" (1891), *The Other House* (1896), *What Maisie Knew* (1897), *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and *The Awkward Age* (1899).



fastens on the idea of narrative restraint — of limited perspective in the one and of inchoate description in the other. And yet, if *Maisie* is a novel about the problem of “the child in the midst” of a corrupt adult order, then *The Turn of the Screw* might be accurately described as the inverse: as a story about the problem of an adult practically isolated in the midst of an absorbing and strange child world.

At the end of *The Turn of the Screw*, the governess faces a perilous conundrum. Having at last resolved to confront her young charge, Miles, with the fact of his expulsion, having determined that the risks of such confrontation — the child’s exposure and even torment — are warranted, her interrogation yet falls short of its much anticipated mark. Miles’s murky confession, that he had “said things” to “those he liked,” sends the governess’s ship (of which she has from the start found herself “strangely at the helm” (9)) once again into unknown waters. She writes, “I seemed to float not into clearness, but into a darker obscure, and within a minute there had come to me out of my very pity the appalling alarm of his being perhaps innocent. It was for the instant confounding and bottomless, for if he *were* innocent what then on earth was I?” (83). Implicitly, innocence is a concept that both anchors and troubles the governess’s world view. It is at the center of her understanding in this climactic scene of both herself and Miles. And yet it is difficult, if not impossible, to locate, pin-down, and label. In part, this difficulty is inherent within the concept. Innocence is defined as a negative liberty. It is the “freedom from” any number of suspect qualities ranging from sin, to guilt, to knowledge of evil, to knowledge in general, to cunning and artifice.<sup>5</sup> Naming innocence

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<sup>5</sup> The first three entries in the O.E.D. for innocence define it as the “Freedom from” the range of characteristics listed. The first entry focuses on biblical, moral sense of innocence as “freedom from sin, guilt, or moral wrong in general; the state of being untainted with, or unacquainted with, evil; moral purity.” The second emphasizes criminality: “Freedom from specific guilt; the fact of not being guilty of

requires the positive identification of an absent quality. Worse, to name innocence is to risk its loss. As absolute absence, innocence is fragile; to even ask after it is to risk the cultivation of a knowledge that will be its ruin. But in part innocence is particularly difficult to pin-down in *The Turn of the Screw* because, rather than being fragile, it is proves to be all too accessible. In this scene innocence structures the child and the adult into two opposing poles. One is innocent and one is not. But the pivotal question is who is which? While the governess's "appalling alarm" that Miles might, after all, be innocent speaks to the no less appalling presumption that he might be otherwise, the more striking notion is that the innocence the child may have lost might have been found and relocated in her, adult self. For if Miles were not innocent, then she most assuredly would be.

That the governess has presumed herself to be the bearer of innocence is precisely her cause for alarm in this new moment of doubt. From the beginning the signs of the governess's innocence have been on full display. Her earliest breaches with the decorum of her office, as when she interrogates Mrs. Grose regarding the ghost-figure of Peter Quint, are justified by her ability "to meet . . . without scruple, any degree of innocence" (26). When the governess learns of Miles's expulsion, her obsession with the cause is so desperate-seeming that it leads Mrs. Grose to ask, mostly in jest but also partly in earnest: "Are you afraid he'll corrupt *you*?" (12). The governess in *The Turn of the Screw* is a figure divided by innocence. She feels responsible for preserving the innocence of her charges, but she also feels herself to be an innocent among them.<sup>6</sup> That innocence has

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that with which one is charged; guiltlessness." The third emphasizes complex knowledge: "Freedom from cunning or artifice; guilelessness, artlessness, simplicity; hence, want of knowledge or sense, ignorance, silliness."

<sup>6</sup> The question of the governess's innocence or guilt in the corruption of Flora and Miles (and in Miles's death) is crucial to how one reads *The Turn of the Screw*. Early on in the notebooks it is clear that James's earliest thinking about the governess is tied to the possibility, at least, of her innocence. He writes: "Idea of a servant suspected of doing the mean things—the base things people in London take for granted servants

become even a core feature of her identity is evidenced by her narrative paralysis in the face of the alternative. Her question “if he *were* innocent, what then on earth was I?” resembles a moment of identity crisis, except, in this novella, crises of innocence are apparently far worse. The possibility of not being innocent would, it seems, automatically transfigure the governess into a non-identity, would automatically reduce her from an “earth[ly]” who to an unearthly “what.” That *someone* is innocent, it turns out, is one of the few givens that *The Turn of the Screw* has to offer. The challenge really is not whether it exists but where it is to be found and in whom. But this unusual set of questions, for a concept often absolutely, categorically conceived gives rise to yet another, for if its location can be questioned and if its possessors are uncertain, then another, more fundamental question is born — what is innocence in this story after all?

### **The Innocence Cycle: Lose, Find, and Repeat:**

From its re-vitalized seat in the figure and space of childhood as the new Eden to the modern adult fall, extending to its more recent mature configurations as erotically capacious and commercially irresistible, childhood innocence has accrued vast associations: with nature, with physical feeling and embodiment, with the imagination, with the spiritual, with joyous wonder, with the transparent, the pure, the vulnerable, the spontaneous, the desirable and the desired.<sup>7</sup> And these are just a sampling of the

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do—reading letters, diaries, peeing, spying, etc.; turning out utterly innocent and incapable of these things—and turning the tables of scorn on the master or mistress . . .” (111).

<sup>7</sup> Robert Pattison would underscore this series of associations as fundamentally Pelagian, having roots, via Rousseau, to the Pelagian heretics whose central claims, as summarized by Augustine, were that “‘new-born infants are in the same condition as Adam before the Fall,’ and second, ‘that man can be without sin, if he choose’” (52). Juxtaposed alongside this, Pattison emphasizes, is another historical chronology, exemplified in the vast didactic, moralist, and Puritan traditions of children’s literature, which finds no such restored innocence, believing mankind to be fallen already from birth. As this is an article primarily concerned with literary representations of innocence, the former chronology is undoubtedly privileged; however, given the darker elements of modernist innocence, I would not wish, as Pattison has done, to draw so keen a line between the two historically divergent trains of thought. Indeed, Ellen Pifer has

associations that have amassed post-Locke. Interestingly, the concept of the blank slate, which came to be one of the core hand-in-glove figurations for childhood innocence, when it was used by John Locke in the late seventeenth century, intimated almost none of these features. Chiefly this is the case because Locke, unlike Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Romantics to come, conceived of innocence, or in this case, blankness, in strictly neutral terms as a principle opposed to philosophies of the human innate. In one of history's many ironies, these principles would be dramatically revised by Rousseau and almost precisely reversed by the Romantics of the subsequent century.<sup>8</sup> But the figure of the white paper was an important one in so far as it was a concept that grew concepts — becoming itself a kind of blank slate upon which artists and writers would add or subtract (mostly the former) their own individual and cultural theories of innocence.

Inspired by Rousseau's counsel to "love childhood" and by Emile as the sensual, counter-rational, counter-social child of nature, many in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reified childhood innocence as a goal of adultkind (79).<sup>9</sup> Wordsworth most famously hailed "the Child is father of the Man" and relied upon memories of childhood, "of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower," to enrich the depths of poetic creation,

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explored the mixing of these two thematic lines in *Demon or Doll: Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture*, and Djuna Barnes, herself, writes in *Nightwood* that "Man was born damned and innocent from the start, and wretchedly — as he must — on those two themes — whistles his tune" (102).

<sup>8</sup> Though Rousseau took a markedly different tact toward childhood education than did Locke, valuing what he believed to be the child's innate "*sensual or childish* reason" as opposed to any attempt to inculcate "*intellectual or human* reason" (158), he nonetheless agreed with Locke about the dangers of reading novels and poetry (commanding for Emile "no poetry" (169) and declaring "I hate books" (184)) because they are imitations of life, not life itself. *Robinson Crusoe* is, of course, his one notable exception to this rule. By extension, the romantics sought to work within the Rousseauvian tradition of nature-reification but to do so, paradoxically, as De Man argues, through a tandem re-valuation of the imagination (2).

<sup>9</sup> Rousseau's influence on Romanticism is widely acknowledged, particularly where Wordsworth is concerned, but McFarland's aptly titled *Romanticism and the Heritage of Rousseau* provides a rare book-length study of Rousseau's influence on Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley.

philosophical understanding, and human compassion.<sup>10</sup> And for Blake, too, childhood innocence served as a natural and spiritual light, shining the way for the receptive artist to achieve what Roni Natov terms the “higher Innocence” of art (21). The subtitle of Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, “Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul,” speaks to the fragility of innocence, to the crisis of innocence lost in the midst of toil and suffering, but it also represents the possibilities for innocence beyond the temporalities of age, given potentially lasting resonance as a state of the “Human Soul.” Taken together, these writers give shape both to a perception of innocence that is creative (in all its spiritual, natural, and artistic senses) as well as to the emergence of a distinctly modern movement that seeks to make the category of innocence available beyond its years to a particular class of especially thoughtful, spiritual, creative, and/or compassionate persons.

Across the Atlantic, there was a similar association of childhood innocence with the forces of creation as well as with the sense of what it means to be an exemplary adult. In *Nature*, Emerson concedes that “few adults can see nature” for they have lost touch with the child’s ability to let the sun’s light shine past the “eye” to reach “heart” (75). The exception and exceptional adult, he adds, is the one “who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood” (75). To enter the spirit of Nature, for Emerson, is to become once more a child; to extirpate all “egotism,” to return to being “nothing,” even to become the famed “transparent eyeball,” all for Emerson are postures which

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<sup>10</sup> Alan Richardson makes the important point that while there was very little that was original in Romanticism’s glorification of childhood, a point fleshed out in more detail in Pattison’s history of the sentimental treatment of the Renaissance child (47-51), nonetheless it was the Romantics, “particularly Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, and De Quincey,” who “succeeded at popularizing” this image. Of these, the power of Wordsworth’s Immortality Ode was perhaps the most far-reaching. Barbara Garlitz writes that Wordsworth’s Ode “was to the first half of the nineteenth century what *The Origin of the Species* was to the last half” (639), with an influence that extended well beyond the literary sphere, profoundly effecting theologians, laymen, parents, and social activists.

feature a perceived return to childhood innocence. For Thoreau too the movement away from human domestication back to nature as recorded in *Walden* is likewise a return to “the spirit” of childhood innocence. His pithy observation that “Birds do not sing in caves, nor do doves cherish their innocence in dovecots” encapsulates this sense and also points to the primitive, evolutionary narrative that also maps onto childhood for Thoreau, whereby the “infancy of the human race” is re-embodied in the figure of “Every child,” who, “begins the world again” (*Walden* 21).

But accruing out of and along with this positive sense of all that the individual has to gain from innocence’s capacity for creation and transformative change is another sense which emphasizes all that there is to lose and indeed which goes to great lengths to preserve innocence in the face of its loss. Among the many notable features of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* are the many and monstrous ways in which it manages to convey the adult anxiety about children growing up as well as the concomitant desire to enclose the garden of childhood and preserve childhood innocence for as long as is possible in the creative and playful world of make-believe. U.C. Knoepfelmacher reads the opening poem and attendant text of *Alice in Wonderland* in precisely this way, with the poem speaking, in part, to Carroll’s desire to halt the natural progression of season and maturation, expressing his as a futile “desire to linger forever in a mid-summer dream world in which time can stand still,” and with the story signaling an attempt to “detain” in fiction the youth of the actual — and certain to grow up — Alice Lidell, the fictional Alice’s namesake (167-168).

But the story of Carroll and Alice and even that of Rousseau and his idolized Emile also point to yet another type of innocence developing out of and alongside the

sheltered and creative innocences heretofore described. James Kincaid has provocatively asserted that these widespread idealizations of children as pure, innocent, vulnerable, and empty has had a distinct downside, paradoxically spawning fantasies of adult fulfillment in and through them (*Child-Loving* 4-5). Though the late nineteenth century saw Freud theorizing certain sexual continuities between adults and children and even locating positive and plural (in other words, far from empty) sexual desires in childhood, and though the nineteenth and twentieth centuries alike saw Kinseyan efforts against the essentializing and categorical impulses that have come to define modern ideas about sexuality, Kincaid argues that these counter-discourses were not only rejected but were overwhelmed by an opposite insistence on the child's absolute and categorical "Otherness" to the adult (5).<sup>11</sup> In what Kincaid later eponymously terms "erotic innocence," this "other-child[']s]" association with emptiness, with purity, and with vulnerability, all work together to set the stage for the perfect storm of "child-loving" that is both a social mandate and a social taboo of the modern era (65).<sup>12</sup>

A sibling to erotic innocence, wondrous innocence, so termed by Gary Cross, describes the flipside phenomenon whereby adults come to excessively identify with childhood. The increasingly divisive identification of wonder, innocence, and delight

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<sup>11</sup> Kincaid is careful to point out in *Child-Loving* that the same "nineteenth century which saw the beginnings of sexual essentializing, identifying the person with the sexuality (or the sexual behavior), also saw vigorous protests against it," but his examples of this counter-trend consist primarily of figures who as actively engaged in the labeling as not (20-21).

<sup>12</sup> I am here combining observations from Kincaid's first book on this topic *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* and his more recent *Erotic Innocence*. While the former lays out in detail the "other"ing of the child during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Kincaid does not seem to arrive at a sense of the Victorian view of innocence as being a type of innocence deserving its own name, "erotic innocence," until later. Indeed, in *Child-Loving* Kincaid moves from an assertion by Philippe Ariès that "prior to the eighteenth century...nobody worried about soiling childish innocence because 'nobody thought that this innocence really existed'" to nineteenth-century ideas of childhood innocence as "vulnerability" and even posits that "this innocent child may be a very-late-Victorian or, more likely, modern imposition" (72-73). By the time Kincaid writes *Erotic Innocence* this view seems to have evolved to include at least the possibility for an interim and tentative "positive" innocence (among the Romantics) before the modern "negative" innocence of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries gains a full foothold (15).

with childhood, on the one hand, and of stress, uncertainty, and responsibility with the modern adult, on the other, leads “late Victorians, who felt uneasy about enjoying pleasure themselves,” to rediscover the experiences of wonder and delight, according to Cross, “through their children” (29). In projecting a “wondrous world” onto childhood, modern adults also created for themselves a vicarious avenue of escape from “the boring and often stressful realms of markets and work” (27). Limited in the indulgence of their own desires, many parents turned a sublimatory eye toward the indulgence of the perceived desires of their children. As with erotic innocence, wondrous innocence appears to be an emergent product of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, and both also appear to coexist in ironic tension with that society’s pronounced desire to shelter and shield the innocence of childhood from the more liberal experiences of modern life. Erotic innocence revels, in part, in the idea of innocence lost; wondrous innocence operates more by letting in the world than by keeping it out. Yet, while both share a set of significant features (including the notion that childhood becomes a currency valuable for the pleasure it confers upon adults), the pleasures of wondrous innocence, unlike those of its erotic alter-ego, are imagined as being synonymous in a fundamental way with the innocence of childhood. In other words, while the theory of erotic innocence focuses on the cultural emergence of an adult *desire for* the child- other, the theory of wondrous innocence describes the emergence of a modern adult *identification with* the child-self.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> I am, of course, drawing upon (and inverting) the language that Freud uses to describe the male child’s progression through the Oedipal Complex, by developing a desire for the mother and an identification with the father. Based in the Victorian era, the theories of Kincaid and Cross (and the text of *The Turn of the Screw*) historically predate Freud and suggest, to my mind, an interesting set of inversions of the Oedipal Complex, whereby the modern adult seems to have as two separate emergent paths, the option to desire or identify with childhood.



Though innocence might be idealized as an absolute category of consistency, clarity, and purity, historically speaking, it has been anything but that. Rather, it has become a category over-laden with cumulative, even conflicting features. For most, to speak of innocence as a problem is to speak of its loss, but in *The Turn of the Screw* the problem of innocence (which is inevitably also the problem of childhood) is the problem of its historical and cultural accumulation. It is the problem of an innocence so mutable and so enduring, in record and in mind, that it is unable to be lost, after all. Even as scholarship on *The Turn of the Screw* has itself tended toward interpretive pluralism, attempting to embrace, rather than resolve, the ambiguity and ambivalence of the text, this plurality of innocences, at once multiple and morally mixed, has yet to register in any meaningful way.<sup>14</sup>

As Mark Spilka has argued, even the leading Freudian criticism of *The Turn of the Screw*, readings which should be predisposed toward the, particularly sexual, pluripotency of childhood, reveal an implicit dependence upon Rousseauvian notions of “Original Innocence,” a pervasive assumption that the children in the text are “passive or unwilling victims” of “adult harassment” without “positive desires” of their own (107). This set of cross-purposes is what I find when I read Kevin Ohi’s recent “‘Blameless and Foredoomed’: Innocence and Haste in *The Turn of the Screw*.” Though Ohi opens with the powerful and provocative claim that “Panics about the child as ‘erotic enigma’ seek to disavow, above all, the intolerable possibility of ‘innocence and licentiousness in the

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<sup>14</sup> Even though Edmund Wilson’s much considered essay “The Ambiguity of Henry James” makes title reference to ambiguity, it does anything but embrace the concept as such, sparking a now well-known debate over the story’s ghosts as realities or hallucinations. The critical affirmation of ambiguity in James’s *The Turn of the Screw* is not really launched until much later with arguments such as Shoshana Felman’s, that Wilson himself exemplifies the type of critic trapped by the novella’s questions without answers, and Marianne DeKoven’s, that the novella does more than embrace ambiguous uncertainty, it exemplifies a modernist ambivalence, actively supplying “equally powerful evidence” for both sides of the “‘apparitionist’” and “‘antiapparitionist’” debate (*Rich* 48-49).

*same character*,” the dispensing of such licentiousness in the reading that follows seems to fall utterly to the character of the adult governess (124). Using Kincaid’s theoretical framework of “erotic innocence” as a guide post, Ohi claims that it is the governess’s “unrelenting” desire to protect the innocence of Flora and Miles — despite their actual needs or experiences — that ultimately and ironically torments and destroys them (125). But where Ohi addresses a more controversial kind of innocence, he nonetheless reads the text’s relationship to that innocence in a most conventional and uniform way, hierarchically empowering the adult caretaker over the proportionally disempowered children, who become cast as the “blameless and foredoomed” victims of her desire for them (37).

Something akin to the inverse takes shape in Peter Coveney’s emphatically non-Freudian reading of *The Turn of the Screw*.<sup>15</sup> For Coveney, “the depravity of the children is a given fact,” an interpretation that renders this particular James text, for this particular critic, an anomaly unworthy of critical attention (164). At the root of Coveney’s problem with *The Turn of the Screw* is its perceived failure to extend a moral theme which he sees as being central to so many of James’s other works: “the dramatic impact between a freely developing innocence in relation to a corrupting environment” (209). Coveney’s dismissal of *The Turn of the Screw* is unfortunate not only because its serious consideration might have pushed for a less Dickensian and more modernist reading of James’s overall, and undoubtedly vast, innocence-interest, but because, if one is willing to see in James a more experimental and less moral engagement with the theme, then, in

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<sup>15</sup> Coveney contrasts his morally-centered reading of James’s overall body of works with Edmund Wilson’s purposefully “eccentric” reading of *The Turn of the Screw* (209). Coveney goes on to underscore his belief that psychology has little place in literature by claiming that “*The Turn of the Screw* is not a significant work of James’s art, but the product of a seriously disordered sensibility. It is not really a piece for literary analysis at all; but something patently for the psychiatrist” (210).

fact, *The Turn of the Screw* does not present itself in such conflicting terms. The crux of the matter comes down to a perhaps unintentionally ambiguous choice of words. What Coveney terms “a freely developing innocence,” he clearly intends as “a freely developing innocent[t].” From *The Portrait of a Lady* to *What Maisie Knew* to *The Awkward Age*, Coveney perceives innocence as being centrally located in a singular, youthful, naïve, protagonist (Isabel Archer, Maisie Farange, and Nanda Brookenham, respectively). But *innocence*, loosed from any particular *innocent*, is the more properly abstract descriptor for James’s interests in *The Turn of the Screw*. “Innocence” does “freely develop” in this text in the sense that, unrestricted and unpossessed, it roams ambiguously between and among figures, as the closing scene so amply demonstrates, from child to governess and potentially back again and so on and so forth.

Other recent child-centered readings of *The Turn of the Screw* by Maeve Pearson and Ellen Pifer have offered much needed insights into James’s complicated representations of childhood. But even these have tended still to treat innocence within *The Turn of the Screw* as a singular and two-dimensional concept. For Pearson, *The Turn of the Screw* dramatizes the impossible position of children faced with “two wholly incompatible” choices, between conforming to the “Romantic idealization of childhood” (and thus fulfilling adult utopian desires for them and through them) and independently occupying “the space of their own incipient consciousness” (110-111). Innocence in this scenario is polarizing, signaling absolute dependence, emptiness, and transparency. For Pifer too, the “Romantic” modifier seems to reference a kind of innocence that is untextured and uncomplicated. For her, a key narrative arc of *The Turn of the Screw* is the governess’s confrontation with an “altered image” of childhood that culminates in

“the demise of the romantic idyll” (47) and to a loss of “faith in original innocence” (50), where “original” confers singularity to the concept of innocence and reads interchangeably with the prior use of the term “romantic.” In sum, while Pifer and Pearson take great strides in troubling the relationship of *The Turn of the Screw* to innocence (for neither is it a category to be upheld but rather predominantly to be rejected), they do little to trouble the category of innocence itself. To put it yet another way, while *The Turn of the Screw* may prove *ambivalent* in its treatment of innocence, there appears to be little *ambiguity*, for these critics, in the way that term is conceptually evoked.<sup>16</sup>

My point is not that these kinds of innocence — the original, the creative, the sheltered, the erotic, and the wondrous — do not exist in *The Turn of the Screw* but that they all coexist along with many more. The newer, more modern kinds of innocence that appear at the end of *The Turn of the Screw* seem markedly different from the more traditional varieties present in the beginning of this same text. The governess’s shift in emphasis from sheltering to vicariously exposing the child mirrors the shift Cross describes in modern, bourgeois parenting. Though she begins with the deduction that “the more [she] saw the less they would” (27), she ultimately resolves upon a reverse course, exposing Flora and Miles, compelling confessions and forcing confrontations, in order to protect herself: to shield her own dignity and post as well as her growing belief in her own innocence as opposed to theirs.

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<sup>16</sup> Pifer herself uses the phrase “ambivalence toward childhood innocence” to describe James’s approach in *The Turn of the Screw* (24), and her title, *Demon or Doll*, underscores her sense of a widespread, polarized ambivalence in the modern “image of childhood.” For Pearson, James exposes “the paradox of children’s privacy” and the deep “ambivalence” of the age “to the full complexity of children’s lives,” being torn between a Romantic ideal of childhood and its modern opposite, the growing sense of the actual child’s as a complex consciousness (116).

At the other end of this “see-saw” is the creative, Romantic innocence of her narrative’s inception. The governess’s early impressions of Flora are that she shows no “sign of uncomfortable consciousness” and that she lives, “with the deep sweet serenity of one of Raphael’s holy infants,” “radiant[ly]” and “angelic[ally]” in the moment (7-8). Miles is similarly the “beautiful little boy,” “extraordinarily sensitive, yet extraordinarily happy,” who, echoing Thoreau, strikes the governess “as beginning anew each day” (21). In the beginning, Bly is Genesis romantically reincarnated. It is the Garden of Eden of childhood. While in hindsight the governess perceives the house as “a big ugly antique...half-displaced and half-utilised,” in the moment she feels she has entered a world so glorious as to drain “all the colour out of story-books and fairy-tales” (9). Like Alice in Wonderland, the governess imagines herself as having “fallen a-doze and a-dream” into this new world, where the confiding and intrepid Flora leads her, “with her hair of gold and her frock of blue” (the very image of Alice), “danc[ing]...round corners and patter[ing] down passages” (7; 9). The world at Bly (whose very name points to the blithe happiness that such a child world anticipates) is, the governess finds, a space of “constant joy” and “constant fresh discoveries.” Here, she expresses, there will be “no grey prose,” only the “romance of the nursery and the poetry of the schoolroom” (18).

Like Lewis Carroll, James incorporates the Romantic associations of childhood innocence with the Edenic, with the space of natural perfection and original creation, but also like Carroll’s *Wonderland*, *The Turn of the Screw* demonstrates the strong post-Romantic urge to manufacture real or imaginary barriers for such spaces, to shield and preserve them long past what their natural duration might otherwise be and, in point of fact, in a manner inconsistent with the natural liberty such spaces were historically

believed to invoke.<sup>17</sup> Though the governess's job is to educate the children for their future roles, she feels nonetheless compelled toward a different, fantastical end: to design "a really royal extension of the garden and the park," to fence the children off forever from "the rough future" to come (14). At the same time that Flora and Miles are perceived to embody the positive, creative capacity of childhood innocence, they are also imagined as "little creatures," (27) "blameless and foredoomed" (37) in need of extensive censorship and "extraordinary flights of heroi[c]" defense (27).

Edenic, creative, sheltered, erotic, and wondrous are all types of innocence which appear and reappear throughout *The Turn of the Screw*, so much so that it is striking how often the children's innocence must be lost so that it might be regained. Indeed, before the narrative proper has even begun, before the children can be conceived, as they are by the governess, as having "nothing to call even an infinitesimal history," of having "never for a second suffered," they have in fact accumulated an intensely marred past (19). They have lost parents and grandparents, home and nation (having been raised in India); they have even lost their servant caretakers, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel. And too, though the great aim of the governess is to shield the children from the ghosts of these servants past, the facts of the story are that they have already been exposed — in the flesh as it were — to their sinister influence. Mrs. Grose early on confesses to the governess that Quint, of the lowest stature and servitude, not only took full charge of the house and children in their uncle's absence but that he was, worst of all, "much too free" with everyone (25). His relationship with Miss Jessel turns her into a fallen woman, in every sense of that

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<sup>17</sup> U.C. Knoepfelmacher examines *Alice in Wonderland* as in part an expression of Carroll's desire to halt the natural progression of season and maturation, expressing his as a futile "desire to linger forever in a mid-summer dream world in which time can stand still," in which the actual childhood of Alice Lidell can be "detain[ed]... 'an hour underground'" through her fictive namesake (167-168).

expression, and the suggestion of his “perpetual” society with Miles, as much of an open secret as the former, is that, at the minimum, Miles has acquired a second-, if not first-hand, sexual knowledge (34). And though Flora’s experience was undoubtedly lesser, Mrs. Grose also confesses that while Miles was with the basest Quint, his sister was all the while with the “infamous” Jessel (31). The threat that Quint and Jessel will tempt the children to untold evils is really the threat of a repeat performance, perhaps more dangerous than the first but nonetheless secondary to what has already occurred. And yet, in order to imagine the children as white paper, sans history and hardship, these extensive slates full of loss and corruption too are, effortlessly it seems, wiped clean.

The pattern of innocence lost and found repeats itself in the governess’s early impressions of both children. Indeed, only pages after Mrs. Grose’s disturbing confessions, only pages after the governess laments, “I don’t save or shield them! It’s far worse than I dreamed. They’re lost!” she nonetheless turns full circle and determines to “give to grievous fancies and even to odious memories a kind of brush of the sponge” (32, 36). Barring additional evidence, she grants both children a “fresh start” (37). And this is already Miles’s second such return to innocence. Indeed, Miles’s appearance in the narrative and at Bly are both preceded by the dark cloud of his expulsion. Though this expulsion is the very prerequisite for his character’s entrance, in the flesh as it were, his physical showing is, it turns out, all that is required to clear him. His “incredibly beautiful” emergence reveals him “on the instant, without and within.” All anyone need do is “*look at him!*” the governess proclaims, to see that the “cruel charge” cannot live where the “sweetness of innocence” so evidently reigns (13). In each of these early instances, innocence is tantamount to transparency, consistency, and spontaneity. Flora

and Miles cannot help but show their true natures, and show them even “on the instant,” when surface and depth are so fully, so simply collapsed.

Yet, even when Miles proves plotting and inconsistent (after he has colluded with his sister to sneak out onto the lawn at night in order [as he claims] to surprise the governess with his potential for bad behavior or [as she believes] to commune with the evil spirit of Peter Quint) his innocence is nevertheless swiftly restored. Indeed, in a moment that seems a contradiction to the first, the governess yet finds Miles’s struggle “to play a part of innocence and consistency” “unutterably touching.” Though he no longer possesses the healthful bloom of the schoolroom poet, Miles now readily fills the shoes of the Victorian charity case. With his face “framed in its smooth whiteness,” he becomes “as appealing as some wistful patient in a children’s hospital,” for whom the governess would have given all she “possessed on earth really to be the nurse or the sister of charity who might have helped to cure him” (60-61). Having evidently crossed the line of experience, Miles remains innocent because his brand of innocence changes. The governess arrives at a new set of conditions. She writes: “Say that, by the dark prodigy I knew, the imagination of all evil *had* been opened up to him: all the justice within me ached for the proof that it could ever have flowered into an act” (63). In one sense, the governess shifts toward a negative sense of innocence that rests on the child’s presumed weakness and vulnerability. Though already exposed, little is permanent for the child whose victimization makes him as easily extracted from the scene of danger as he was led into it in the first place. But in another sense, the governess shifts outside of the realm of childhood innocence altogether. In drawing upon the popular judicial doctrine of “innocent until proven guilty,” the governess expands the litmus test of innocence beyond



active goodness and original creation, beyond knowledge of sex and sin, and even beyond the experience of each of these, to the adult standard of criminal action and intent. With so many varieties to choose from and now without hard evidence to the contrary, innocence in *The Turn of the Screw* proves strangely durable. Call upon whatever history or category necessary, innocence in this context seems destined (or doomed) to survive.

### **The Governess in the Midst:**

In one sense, this vision of a flexible, resilient, and default innocence contrasts with its characterization as a temporary, fragile state, but in another, more subtle way, it runs with the grain of modern literary and cultural efforts. Unsatisfied with limiting innocence — or childhood itself for that matter — to children alone, the successors to Romanticism have increasingly carved out pathways whereby the innocent and the childlike can endure the transition from youth to age. For Blake and Wordsworth the path to a second, higher innocence was narrowly forged, requiring great efforts at compassion and creativity, but as the cultural role of the child moved from the periphery to the bourgeois heart of society, efforts to celebrate, extend, and relive the innocent wonder of childhood grew such that the twentieth century came to be forecast as “The Century of the Child.”<sup>18</sup>

James himself employed a variation of this phrase nearly two decades prior to its more famous incarnation as the title of Ellen Key’s 1909 text, but instead of rallying a

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<sup>18</sup> This statement represents a composite of claims already cited elsewhere. Briefly, both Natov and Pattison (58-59) describe the limits of adult access to a second innocence as envisioned by the Romantic poets, Blake and Wordsworth. Cunningham addresses the expansion of the concept of childhood as it gradually came to include, ideally if not practically, all children; and Steedman addresses the flipside of this — the perceived expansion, through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, of the adult’s interior attachment and access to childhood.

society toward a progressive future, James's suggestion is of an imminent "juvenile takeover" (Shine 47). In the voice of the forthright and outspoken Miss Sturdy, James writes:

*A propos* of the young people, that is our other danger; the young people are eating us up,—there is nothing in America but the young people. The country is made for the rising generation; life is arranged for them; they are the destruction of society. People talk of them, consider them, defer to them, bow down to them.... The future is theirs; maturity will evidently be at an increasing discount. Longfellow wrote a charming little poem called "The Children's Hour," but he ought to have called it "The Children's Century." And by children, of course, I don't mean simple infants; I mean everything of less than twenty. (536-537)

For Miss Sturdy, childhood in America has become doubly and dangerously expansive: absorbing years (now up to twenty) and usurping prime cultural real estate from society's more mature membership. Whether or not her "point of view" toward childhood is, as Muriel Shine argues, consistent with James's own at the time, its concerns are at least partially realized in the child-centered world of *The Turn of the Screw*, where the ever-larger umbrella of childhood, while perhaps not signaling the "destruction of society," poses a no less significant threat to the person of the governess and, for that matter, to the children themselves.

*The Turn of the Screw* reads like a bildungsroman. Despite the fact that it begins at the point of the governess's educational maturity, when she has acquired her first teaching position, and despite the fact that it chiefly spans only the summer months of that employment's brief duration, the narrative arc yet emphasizes hers as a journey that begins in the spirit of a blooming, youthful naiveté and ends in a reverberating fall: from grace, into autumn, and, for the dispossessed Miles, from life to death (85). The governess's entrance into Bly represents, on the one hand, her first foray into adult responsibility and even, she hopes, into adult romance, but, on the other hand, it also

quickly comes to embody for her the gift of a second childhood. Of this tension, particularly in relation to the instruction of Miles, she writes:

I found it simple, in my ignorance, my confusion and perhaps my conceit, to assume that I could deal with a boy whose education for the world was all on the point of beginning...Lessons with me indeed, that charming summer, we all had a theory that he was to have; but I now feel that for weeks the lessons must have been rather my own. I learnt something—at first certainly—that had not been one of the teachings of my small smothered life; learnt to be amused, and even amusing, and not to think for the morrow. It was the first time, in a manner, that I had known space and air and freedom, all the music of summer and all the mystery of nature (14).

The governess begins with a recognition of what her and the children's roles should have been in "theory," but the "charming" circumstances of Bly, paired with her own heretofore "small smothered life," combine to create a practical reversal of these roles. In the midst of this new world, the governess herself embodies the spirit of the "young" and the "untried" (5). "Confus[ed]" and "ignorant" of the situation's complexities, she finds herself operating, like an innocent, under a set of "simple" assumptions. Indeed, instead of preparing Flora and Miles for their own entrances into adult life, they educate her in the ways of childhood romance. The governess truly comes from a different world, certainly from a different class, "the youngest of several daughters of a poor country parson" (4). Though she has perhaps experienced the "smothered" terrain of sheltered innocence, with these children, in this uniquely independent, child-centered environment, the governess is initiated, she feels, into the "space," the "freedom," the "music," and the "mystery" of child wonder and creativity. The governess comes to describe the children's company as offering an otherworldly "antidote" to the "pains" of her and her family's real life hardships (19), and confesses

feeling that “to throw” herself into “life with Miles and Flora” was “to throw [herself] out of trouble.”

“Throw [herself] into life with Flora and Miles” she does indeed do, but as a means of escaping pain and problems, this new immersion proves to be immensely misguided. To take up first the issue of her success, or the extent to which the governess does at last succumb, one need look no further than her perceived ability to “meet” Flora and Miles not just on “any degree of innocence” (as she implies in an early conversation with Mrs. Grose) but in the manner of perception itself (26). The governess comes to approximate her own version of wondrous innocence in wondering about the children. She writes:

I have spoken of the surrender to their extraordinary childish grace as a thing I could actively promote in myself, and it may be imagined if I neglected now to apply at this source for whatever balm it would yield. Stranger than I can express certainly, was the effort to struggle against my new lights. It would doubtless have been a greater tension still, however, had it not been so frequently successful. I used to wonder how my little charges could help guessing that I thought strange things about them; and the circumstance that these things only made them more interesting was not by itself a direct aid to keeping them in the dark. I trembled lest they should see that they *were* so immensely more interesting. (36-37)

Though there are unmistakable voyeuristic overtones to the governess’s new, strange, and secret interest in the children, the language of voyeurism shades seamlessly into a language of “wonder.” The line between erotic and wondrous innocence is certainly slim enough. Each imagines a vicarious adult pleasure achieved at the risk if not the actual cost of child exposure, but where erotic innocence preys on the perceived distance between child and adult, wondrous innocence hinges on its collapse. There are significant parallels between the governess’s relationship — particularly with Miles — and Quint’s. Both are servants with sole responsibility for the children and both take to being

“perpetually,” even inappropriately, in their company. But the majority of the story of *The Turn of the Screw* bears on the governess’s as a revised and reversed relationship with the children, with dramatically different, if not dramatically better, means and ends.

The language of this and subsequent passages characterizes the governess in terms familiar to childhood, not vice versa. No field of vision could belong more to childhood than “wonder.” In “wonder”ing about and over her charges, particularly in play, the governess implicitly doubles their mentality. Her wonder is attached to theirs. Her “new lights” are their everyday lenses. The characterizations of child perception as “strange” or “new” are both familiar and commonplace, particularly in the world of literary representation. Most notably, in this case, these are in part the definitive attributes to the telescopic sight and insight of James’s own Maisie in *What Maisie Knew* and the imagined, though unconfirmed, otherworldly communications of Miles and Flora with their former servants.<sup>19</sup> It is significant, therefore, that here it is the adult governess who is at the center of this “strange” experience of “struggl[ing] against [her] new lights.” By applying the language so often used to describe child perception to what might otherwise be read wholly as an instance of erotic innocence, the narrative suggests a change in the governess that exceeds the distance and inherent difference of voyeuristic desire. It

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<sup>19</sup> There are innumerable examples of this type of perception in nineteenth century literature (e.g. *The Scarlet Letter*’s Pearl; *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s Eva; *The Secret Garden*’s Dickon; *At the Back of the North Wind*’s Diamond). Nearly all of James’s child characters possess at least the implication of strange insight. In addition to Maisie (the most notable) and Flora and Miles, Morgan in “The Pupil” also shares this particular, remarkable ability. Dieter Petzold, in “A Race Apart,” writes that in late Victorian literature, “Again and again it is suggested that adults and children are really worlds apart, separated by a gulf which few adults are able to bridge” (34). It is a separation that feeds, according to Petzold, the increasingly popular trope of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century children’s literature of separate child societies which function outside of the previously dominant familial frame. Outside of the literary world, this period also produced a number of studies on “the child mind.” An article on the “Mind in Childhood” pronounces its subject “a riddle — a mystery beyond all our philosophy”; another, entitled “At the Back of the Child Mind” (invoking MacDonald’s *At the Back of the North Wind*) similarly describes the child mind as “a region into which the ‘grown-up’ has no right of entry, and no key to turn the lock”; and Professor Edwin Diller Starbuck, Ph.D., characterizes child and adult consciousness as being so unlike as to belong “to entirely different species.”

suggests a change not just in what she perceives but in the internal mechanism of perception. In other words, the implication is of a change in subjectivity, a crossing from an adult to a child point of view.

In what follows the governess reveals even more precisely how similar her new persona is to that of the conceptual child's. Beyond a capacity for wonder, they have come to share the spirit of simultaneity, of passion, and revelation too. A direct effect of her "new lights," the governess experiences "moments," she writes, "when I knew myself to catch them up by an irresistible impulse and press them to my heart," moments when she fears she "betray[s] too much" of herself. But, the governess goes on, these impulses are potentially matched in a system of risk and reward by "the traceable increase of [the children's] own demonstrations" (37). In other words, the governess implicitly recognizes the parallels between her own modified subjectivity and that of the conventionally innocent child; from her spontaneous and revealing "little outbreaks...of sharper passion," she anticipates a mirror response in the form of a second, equally impulsive, passionate, and revealing, reaction from her child charges.

Whereas the governess had previously garnered self-praise for demonstrating reserve in the face of child sharing, her actions in this case evince a dramatic, perhaps even desperate, dialogic shift. The governess has already, in fact, begun to perceive herself as a member of Flora and Miles's inner circle, and here she seeks (and will continue to seek) a child confession to affirm that feeling. Earlier, she had expressed: "We were cut off, really, together; we were united in our danger. They had nothing but me, and I—well, I had them" (27). However reluctant the governess may be to admit the extent of her own reciprocal dependence, this is a statement that insists, three times no

less, on her relationship with the children as one uniquely shared. The repetition of their “together[ness],” their “unit[y],” and their mutual dependence, along with the exaggerated emphasis attached to it — they are “really” alone, “really” together; they have “nothing” but each other — suggests not just the strangeness of the situation, so strange as to command excess proof, but also the pleasure to be found in it; isolation and danger appear as mere backdrops to the new intimacy and community forged to face them.

But, most importantly, the governess’s “new lights,” characterized by wonder, exhibitions of passion, and the hope for communal exchange — all catalyzed by the presence of children — signify the complex shift in her epistemological process. Throughout, the governess has taken great analytic pains to seek out and provide a logical, empirical framework for her suspicions and her responses to them, more often than not placing a particular rational faith in the visual sense. To see the letter expelling Miles is to believe that he has committed some grievous error. Of course, then, to see the child himself is to believe completely and entirely otherwise. Concomitantly, the converse is also often true, whereby the governess cannot believe what she cannot see. When she can see no physical ugliness in the children, she believes them to be psychically incapable of such. And, as with the children, this same logic applies to the ghosts. In her first sighting of Peter Quint, the governess underscores the connection, for her and indeed for many, between seeing and believing by affirming for the reader: “So I saw him as I see the letters I form on this page” (16). And in her second sighting she further demonstrates the converse: “He was there or was not there: not there if I didn’t see him” (20).

But even by this second encounter, the governess's sense of reason begins to intermix with other, more indirect forms of knowing, forms, that, as the title suggests, function by twists and turns rather than by means of straight and open assessment. Indeed, in this particular instance, she actually possesses no clear line of sight either to what is there or to what is not. Though "there were shrubberies and big trees" blocking either the appearance or disappearance of Quint's ghost, the governess yet somehow knows — because she "felt with clear assurance" — that "none of them concealed him" (20). One implication of this "felt...assurance" is that the governess is not alone in her knowledge and, in fact, is not even its primary source. As with her increasing "outbreaks of...passion" toward Flora and Miles, this encounter reveals the extent to which her epistemological shift is affectively centered, where feeling precedes or even replaces sight as the basis for conviction and action.

This new and growing sense of indirect consciousness receives an even more explicit treatment later, when, engaged as some stationary object in one of Flora's games by the "Sea of Azof," the governess becomes "suddenly" aware of the figure of Miss Jessel on the other side. Importantly, the governess explicates her own epistemological process: "The way this knowledge gathered in me," she relates, was "the strangest thing in the world," for "I began to take in with certitude and yet without direct vision the presence, a good way off, of a third person" (28). That the governess is aware of her own semi-irrational shift in consciousness speaks, among other things, to the magnitude of that shift. What is "strange" (to draw upon her now second use of that term as applied to her own perceptive process) is the paradoxical intensity of her vision, always either "clear" or "certain," in spite of the many obstacles to actual sight. In this case, despite the



distance and despite, what's more, her own misdirected gaze, the governess yet feels that "there was no ambiguity in anything; none whatever at least in the conviction I from one moment to another found myself forming as to what I should see straight before me and across the lake as a consequence of raising my eyes" (28). More than representing the twisted pleasures (and torments) of reading James, the convolution of this last quoted sentence grammatically illustrates the confused and passive relationship between the governess and her own consciousness, whereby her conviction syntactically precedes the process by which it is "form[ed]." And stronger still is the syntactical delay of direct sight, enacted phrase by tortuous phrase, until, at last, the governess actually "rais[es]" her eyes so that she might directly confirm that of which she has already been indirectly convinced.

The terms "new," "indirect," "strange," and "felt" are all collectively important ways of conceptualizing the governess's epistemological shift in part because these are the terms which she and James use, in part because in using them internal narrator and author highlight the link between the governess's changing consciousness and the perceived consciousness and capacity of childhood, long envisioned as substantially irrational and innate, with stronger pathways to the sensual, the emotional, and the metaphysical.<sup>20</sup> The governess's new, knowing method is, like the child's, characterized by innocence. It is a naïve knowledge unaware of its own process, organically grown and unconsciously harvested. But the new, the different, and the irrationally resolved are all,

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<sup>20</sup> The history of the child's association with the irrational, bestial, and savage extends long before Freud's sexually explicit characterization. Pattison writes that Greek and Roman writers in general considered children as "subrational, subhuman creatures" and quotes Aristotle who writes of "children and the lower animals" as of a kind (1). And Cunningham describes the way in which the child-savage link took general hold in the second half of the nineteenth century which came to see human development as a process of "growing up...through the stages of civilization" such that "all children came to be thought of as savages" (131).

as often as not, sources of immense social and personal anxiety such that these same terms also connotatively indicate, like the novella's title, how portentously misguided the adult colonization of childhood — its society, its mentality, and its presumed innocence — can be.

One way the narrative maps the dangers of this immersion is through its own creative conjuncture of the fairy tale form and the ghost story, genres which have historically appealed to all ages, but often to very different ends.<sup>21</sup> In his own preparatory materials, James highlights the commonalities between the two, referring to *The Turn of the Screw*, almost interchangeably, as either a ghost story or a fairy tale and indeed in a 1909 preface, he writes of the “ghost-story” that it “has ever been for me the most possible form of the fairy-tale” (104). As an artist, James is struck by the juxtaposition in both genres between, on the one hand, what he terms, an “absolute singleness” and “compactness” of form and, on the other, by the “extreme freedom” of a substance forged, as he writes of *The Turn of the Screw*, out of “an excursion into chaos” (124-125). But the interchange between fairy tale and ghost story, though *The Turn of the Screw* is most evidently the latter, is not merely an esoteric one. Bly is, at least initially, emphasized as a fairy tale locale. Flora and Miles are, at least initially, perceived as fairy tale children. Together they indeed lead the governess to believe again in, perhaps the most unrealistic of all fairy tale claims, the possibility for “a happily ever after.” But if the governess proves capable of entering the fairy tale that opens the novella, the children

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<sup>21</sup> Jack Zipes writes that a nearly universal purpose of the modern fairy tale is “to provide hope in a world seemingly on the brink of catastrophe” (1); “Their ‘once upon a time,’” as he goes on to write of the Grimm fairy tales, for instance, “keeps alive our utopian longings for a better world that can be created out of our dreams and actions” (79). Even within the particularly moralistic realm of the Victorian fairy tale, the ends of the modern fairy tale are traditionally at odds with those of the ghost story. Where the former points optimistically toward the future, the latter speaks to the Victorian’s historical “anxiety,” to their belief in and fear of a potentially “vindictive past” (Cox ix).

most certainly command central roles in the ghost story to follow. In the same way that the fairy tale asks the child to believe the realistically unbelievable, often in playfully decadent ways, and in the same way that the ghost story asks adults to believe in nearly unimaginable, amorphous terrors invisible to themselves, so the combination of the two, what substantively amounts to a turning from one to the other, asks the adult readers of *The Turn of the Screw* to believe something unbelievable about childhood: that it too can turn from the wondrous to the terrifying.

Though the governess perceives two ghosts at Bly, James intimates the presence of a figurative third in the multiple confluences between the child and the ghostly. Early on, the governess describes herself as being “under a charm” (14) or “under the spell” (19) of the children. Later, when she finds both children out of bed, Flora transfixed at her window, the governess and the reader too are filled with the expectation of another spectral sighting. Only, what we behold instead, alone on the lawn, is Miles. Indeed, child and ghost receive identical narrative treatment. The same phrase, “presence on the lawn,” is used twice, once to describe the anticipation of the ghost and then again to describe the figure of the child himself (43). “Presence” is also used to describe Flora in the governess’s final confrontation with her, with Miss Jessel “on the opposite” side of the lake (68). In all of the versions prior to the New York 1908 edition, James describes Flora’s expression, “turned” on the governess, as one “of hard, still gravity,” as “an expression absolutely new and unprecedented,” and as one “that somehow converted the little girl herself into the very *presence* that could make [the governess] quail” (Magnum, 1968 155-156; emphasis added). In the New York edition, the allusion relies on the governess’s proclamation to Mrs. Grose (upon the apparent discovery that eight-year-old

Flora has herself managed the boat across the lake) that “at such times” Flora is neither alone nor a child; she is rather “an old, old woman” (66). These confluences show case the connections between each child and his own respective ghostly counterpart, where Miles converges with Quint and Flora with Miss Jessel.<sup>22</sup>

Yet the children are in a sense more terrifying, in part because they make for very surprising ghosts. Where Quint and Jessel represent, and not unexpectedly so, the threat of an inexorable evil, an evil that simply will not die, Flora and Miles haunt the governess (and the text) in precisely the opposite and in precisely the most unexpected way, evincing a look of innocence, a “more than earthly beauty,” an “absolutely unnatural goodness,” that endures where it should not (47). As Quint and Jessel acted the roles of servant and teacher in life (one of the governess’s key identifying features of Quint’s ghost is that he looks “like an actor” (23)), the new suggestion is that Flora and Miles may also be performing, not embodying, innocence. The governess declares their innocence in one moment “a policy and a fraud” and suspects, in another, that Miles is “taxed to play, under the spell laid on him, a part of innocence and consistency” (61). But innocence, where the governess is concerned — Romantic, erotic, wondrous, or now ghostly and unnatural — is still innocence to be sheltered and preserved. Miles on the lawn is still “poor little Miles”; the whiteness of his visage calls the governess to save and to shield him. Flora’s expression at the lake too is haunting in its undying show of innocence. What strikes the governess is the smoothness of the child’s “small pink face”

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<sup>22</sup> The governess, it should be said, appears at times a figurative medium for both ghosts. She replaces Quint at the window, and with her face as white as his own gives Mrs. Grose a fright. As the living replacement for Miss Jessel, she often finds herself in a mirror position with this, her predecessor and ghostly counterpart, as when they face each other on opposite sides of the reflective lake. But this is more evidence, to my mind, of the narrative’s attempts to link (even if it is only in the governess’s own mind) governess and children as members of a strangely perceptive community. In other words, her ability to perceive the ghosts is so akin to the child’s that she is, or she imagines herself to be, capable of substituting her exposure for theirs.

and the look, directed from her, as if to “accuse and judge.” In either case, the images of the children, like the ghosts, serve as haunting reminders and vigilant critics of the governess’s self-perceived role — to be herself the savior of innocence — but they also together represent the monstrous possibilities for the undying dead, be it in the form of a returned evil or in the form of an enduring innocence that turns and changes but will not be lost.

Another way that James emphasizes both the expanding connection between governess and child and the problems lurking within that relation is through the novella’s title, which makes two appearances within the text, featuring first one and then the other of these two core narrative subjects. There have been many scholarly accounts for the meaning of the phrase “turn of the screw,” but the vast majority emphasize its, no doubt, dominant allusion to a device meant for securing tension and/or inflicting torture.<sup>23</sup> Shoshana Felman’s “Henry James: Madness and the Risks of Practice (Turning the Screw of Interpretation)” stands as an important exception to this trend pointing out the obvious, but vastly overlooked, multiple meanings for the term “turn” which range from “*change*,” to “*displacement*,” to “the question of *sense*,” as in one’s sense of direction, understanding, or sanity (221-222).<sup>24</sup> In other words, where most are, perhaps unavoidably, drawn to the intensity of the screw’s effect, Felman points to the title’s

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<sup>23</sup> Many scholars have read the title specifically as a reference to the manner in which the governess tortures the children, epitomized by her final death-hold on Miles (e.g. Blanchot 85, Edel, *Norton* 191, Pippin 121); others have read it as a more ambiguous and multivalent reference to, among other things, the tension and/or torture the narrative inflicts either on its child characters or on its readers (e.g. Sheppard 17, Bengels 323-324, Lustig 178).

<sup>24</sup> Lustig also devotes more recent substantial attention to text’s use of the word “turn.” Lustig makes the interesting point that though the word “ghost” is “virtually excluded from the text,” “turn” is “repeatedly and markedly present” (126). Lustig still concludes, however, like most, that the title ultimately “connotes various forms of restriction, intensification, enclosure, enforcement or constraint” (178). Indeed even Felman’s meta-interpretive reading is not contrary to this. The intent of the narrative, as signified by its title, is still for her, as for Lustig and others, to entrap and constrain.

equal emphasis on artifice, or how that effect is ironically and artificially achieved. The mechanism of the screw, like the mechanism of the governess's epistemological shift, is one marked by such turns, literally securing its end by circling around it. In either incarnation, it is indirection which gives the ironic sense of producing the most penetrating effect, the most potent hold. And yet, this sense of indirect mastery is often, according to Felman, misdirected. This is obviously true for the governess who ultimately loses her grip on Flora and Miles, on her post, and possibly (as many have argued) on her sense of reality. But it is also, Felman demonstrates, true for the reader who seeks in vain for an interpretive hold on the text itself. The final turn of the screw for Felman is the way the novella turns on itself and turns on this reader, entrapping the would-be controller, denying the meaning that would be held.

However, if the reader's and governess's investments in a screw-wielding mastery are mistaken, as Felman persuasively argues, then their error cannot be adequately measured without the child medium so essential to both. Missing more generally from the various etymological interpretations of "the turn of the screw" is the turning of the child, unique to James's particular metaphorical application. The children central to both title moments (for they are different children) embody a strangeness which not only displaces their own unnatural experiences onto their adult companions and readers but which catalyzes this displacement and indeed intensifies the effects thereof. In its first use, in relation to the story of Griffin's ghost, these are the precise elements which serve to whet the appetite of suspense leading up to the narrative main event. The frame narrator gives an account of the tale and Douglas's response to it:

The case...was that of an apparition in just such an old house as had gathered us for the occasion—an appearance, of a dreadful kind, to a little boy sleeping in the

room with his mother and waking her up in the terror of it; waking her not to dissipate his dread and soothe him to sleep again, but to encounter also herself, before she had succeeded in doing so, the same sight that had shocked him. It was this observation that drew from Douglas... a reply that had the interesting consequence to which I call attention... “I quite agree—in regard to Griffin’s ghost, or whatever it was—that its appearing first to the little boy, at so tender an age, adds a particular touch... If the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to *two* children—?” (1)

The response, ““of course,”” is that ““two children give two turns!”” In this opening equation nothing could be more explicit than the conceptual child’s intimate, one-to-one, relationship with the narrative’s sense of turning. One sense, the one explicated by Douglas, is the vivid, even visceral, affect conferred on the audience, on account of and through the child. For the innocent, impressionable child subject, it is imagined that the appearance of the ghost will produce a more terrifying, more dreadful affect; this affect, Douglas expresses, is passed on to (and whole-heartedly received by) the adult audience.

But within this transference there lies another sense of turning. Beyond the emotional affect of the story, there is also an implication of an exchange, from child to adult, a turning over, a relaying, of terror from one subject to the other. In other words, “the turn of the screw” describes both an end, the heightened affect that is Douglas’s focus, as well as a method, the redirected displacement of experience from child to adult. The latter exchange, indeed, is brought to the fore by its repetition: occurring within as without. One of the surprise turns of the story is the seemingly peculiar reaction of the child to the visitation of Griffin’s ghost. The frame narrator reveals by his account that the child does not react as expected, for though he wakes his mother “in the terror of it,” he does so “not to dissipate his dread” but so that she can “encounter also herself... the same sight that had shocked him.” In other words, the child seeks more than the dissipation of his experience; he seeks its displacement, to turn it — that is, redirect it —

to the nearest adult. In both relationships, between child and mother and between child character and adult audience, the experiences of childhood prove to be terrifyingly shareable; and the child himself proves to be terrifyingly capable of sharing them. On the one hand, the turning of the screw seems to pose a threat to the child — sexual, psychological, and narratological — but *The Turn of the Screw* also explores the flipside of this, whereby the desire to share and stretch the otherwise idealized qualities of childhood, qualities like innocence, wonder, and acute sensibility, can also galvanize terror and hasten the categorical erosion of adult and child.

The second title reference follows further the line by which the governess's ventures into child society (now with Miles alone) renders her dependent upon that society at the same time that it seems to push the children out. With Flora removed from Bly and with Miles now "free" from her instruction and from her self-described "inexorable, perpetual society," the governess lays out her strategy for approaching the remaining child (52). Facing a dilemma she feels is "revoltingly, against nature," she deduces:

I could only get on at all by taking 'nature' into my confidence and my account, by treating my monstrous ordeal as a push in a direction unusual, of course, and unpleasant, but demanding after all, for a fair front, only another turn of the screw of ordinary human virtue. No attempt, none the less, could well require more tact than just this attempt to supply, one's self, *all* the nature. How could I put even a little of that article into a suppression of reference to what had occurred? How on the other hand could I make a reference without a new plunge into the hideous obscure? Well, a sort of answer, after a time, had come to me... Was n't there light in the fact which, as we shared our solitude, broke out with a specious glitter it had never yet quite known—the fact that... it would be preposterous, with a child so endowed, to forego the help one might wrest from absolute intelligence? What had his intelligence been given him for but to save him? Might n't one, to reach his mind, risk the stretch of a stiff arm across his character?" (77-78)



As strategic rationales go, this one is frustratingly opaque, evidencing, in part, the governess's growing investment in indirection as a means to know. Indeed, one general observation worth making is that the passage represents to a great extent a meditation on manipulation: on the governess's turning of nature, of reference, her relationship with the child, and the child himself. But another, culled in tandem, is that this set of manipulations also marks a strategy for compromise. "Another turn of the screw of human virtue" is an expression of these newly cooperative concerns, whereby the governess expresses both the need to fill and to fill absolutely the role that traditionally belongs to the child — as the supplier of "all the nature" — but also to manage that role in a most considered and artificial way, by plotting and strategizing with it — by "taking 'nature' into [her] confidence" and by administering "little" doses of it, as it were, with concealed "tact" and "suppress[ed]... reference[s]." But perhaps the more remarkable application of this new and revised sense of indirection, of turning as a compromised means to an end, shows itself in the governess's new rationale for approaching the child, whose character, she determines might be justifiably breached for the sake of accessing his mind. The goal, in other words, of convincing the child to come clean, that is to confess, justifies the risk of his exposure in the interim.

In light of the ending, this meditation on turning (on turning herself in order that she might save the child and vice versa) represents itself as a significant turning point, supplying justification and permission in the abstract for the manifest interrogation and dispossession to come. The governess's earlier communal sentiment that she and Flora and Miles "were cut off, really, together...were united in [their] danger" (27) is echoed by this new gesture toward a "shared... solitude" with Miles, and both are precursors to

her fatal inability to release Miles from his child role, which is also, in her communal view, a role that she “share[s].” Miles’s request to the governess for her “to let me alone” is a plea really for the recognition of his gender, his age, and the independence conventionally suited to both (62).<sup>25</sup> The difference in the second communal allusion as opposed to the first is that the nature of the union has become far more egalitarian than before. No longer is the governess’s role to sacrifice herself in order to save the children; her consideration now is as much (if not more so) for her own salvation. No longer is she the intellectual and experiential superior. Not only does she now perceive in Miles an adult equal (she invites him, in the end, to the “‘grown-up’ dining room” (19)), but she, more strikingly, perceives herself as an equal to the child. Her feeling that she, and not the child, must “supply herself all the nature” to childhood is a crucial precursor to her feeling, explored in this essay’s opening paragraphs, that she and not Miles has been the bearer of innocence all along. Each of these turns, the turning of nature and of innocence, represents a more general turning over of childhood from the child to the adult. In the end, the governess not only kills Miles, she “dispossess[es]” him. She imagines herself as having battled “with a demon” for the “soul” of the child, and she, in a sense, has won (82).

Many have experienced the turn of *The Turn of the Screw* as a sensation of constraint, of tension, of entrapment, but the capaciousness, what James referred to as the “plasticity,” of childhood, whereby any adult might gain vicarious entry to its heightened wonders, loves, and fears, suggests a loosening, rather than a tightening, where youth and

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<sup>25</sup> In point of fact, Miles’s plea to be let alone repeats the same request of another (older) adult male, his uncle, who earlier outlined as part of the terms of the governess’s employment with the children at Bly that she “take the whole thing over and let him alone” (6).

where innocence are concerned.<sup>26</sup> James always planned *The Turn of the Screw* as a combination of freedom and constraint, as a formally structured fairy tale filled, as it were, with imaginative (and imaginatively evil) blanks. But there are two notable constants in *The Turn of the Screw*: one is the persistence of evil, the other of innocence. And both endure, in large part, because of their ambiguous and, indeed, ambivalent treatment. In *The Turn of the Screw*, innocence and damnation are not merely juxtaposed and neither are they singular poles in a binary display; they are indeterminately intermixed and they are themselves multiple. *The Turn of the Screw* imagines an innocence, like evil, loosed: enduring and horrifying because it is turned, because it is (and has historically been) stretched in any number of directions.

It seems simple to say that the screw that can be turned one way can also be turned another, but James employs both turns to a most complex effect. Indeed, I submit that *The Turn of the Screw* captivates in large measure because it proves that constriction would be a relief to the loose and tormenting uncertainties of the story it tells. There are many, too many, innocences in *The Turn of the Screw*. There is the innocence of Wordsworth and Thoreau in the angelic freshness of Bly and its child inhabitants; there is the innocence of Dickens and Carroll in the governess's ruling desire to elongate and protect this innocence even through the experiences that would otherwise replace it; there is the erotic innocence implicit in her voyeuristic, turned physical attachment, particularly to Miles; there is wondrous innocence in the governess's desires to live herself a second childhood through life with Flora and Miles despite and in conflict with her adult responsibilities toward them; and, finally, there is the innocence of her desire to supplant

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<sup>26</sup> Henry James, "To Dr. Louis Waldstein," 21 October 1898, *The Letters of Henry James*, ed. Percy Lubbock, vol. 1 (1920; London: Macmillan and Co., Elibron Classics Replica, 2006) 305.

them in theirs. But there is another kind of innocence that arises from the sum-total of all of these, an innocence free-floating and disembodied, attached no longer to the child alone. Innocence in *The Turn of the Screw* is a skin stretched big enough to fit adult as well as child, but it is also, potentially, a costume, loosed altogether from the naturally innate. The governess suspects time and time again that the children's innocence is a show, "a policy and a fraud," that it is a theatrical device that Miles, in particular, strives, and often succeeds, to "play at." In a story so obviously centered on unnatural terrors, it is surprising, but of course should not be, that innocence too should prove potentially monstrous. Innocence remains at the end of *The Turn of the Screw* as a field of contest between governess and child, but its possibilities for possession and repossession (the very qualities that have sustained it beyond mortality and age) comes with a heavy price, not the least of which are its own transmogrification and the death of the child.

## **II *Nightwood*: "Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed," or Modernism Early and Late**

"The doctor's head, with its over-large black eyes, its full gun-metal cheeks and chin, was framed in the golden semi-circle of a wig with long pendent curls that touched his shoulders, and falling back against the pillow, turned up the shadowy interior of their cylinders. He was heavily rouged and his lashes painted. It flashed into Nora's head, 'God, children know something they can't tell, they like Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed!'" (69)

Like red riding hood and the wolf, *The Turn of the Screw* and *Nightwood* make for strange bedfellows. Lying at opposite ends of the modernist timeline, they are divided by vast cultural changes and by a world war. The only biographical connection between the two respective authors is an insult: Barnes reportedly cast one of her many and

favored pejoratives James's way, calling him "a silly pansy."<sup>27</sup> And though they each invoke and seek to modernize the fairy tale form, they do so in entirely divergent ways. Where, for James, there was an inspirational, modernist evocation in the distinction between the fairy tale's formal strictures and substantive excess, for Barnes the fairy tale is unbounded and unsalvageable. In addition to red riding hood, the wolf, and the grandmother, allusions to sleeping beauty and goldilocks are also evident in Dr. Matthew O'Connor's elusive attempts either to find the right bed or to conquer sleep. The only thing resembling the formal restraint of the fairy tale that James embraced with such enthusiasm is the claustrophobia of O'Connor's apartment with a bed so "narrow" that all of these fairy tale images crowd together in any number of imaginatively obscene ways.<sup>28</sup>

Yet both works share a striking thematic preoccupation not just with childhood but with innocence, not just with innocence but with its adult colonization, and not just with this colonization but with a view toward its impending horror. Far from overwriting the distance that separates *The Turn of the Screw* and *Nightwood*, I want to emphasize it as the backdrop that makes these precise and repeated cautionary tales all the more worthy of comparative study. Though they belong to two very different cultural narratives and seek two different narrative ends, these texts have nonetheless climbed into the same bed. Early and late, modernism is framed by its preoccupation with the problem of immortal innocence. With *The Turn of the Screw*, James forecasts an

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<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that Barnes shared this assessment of James not with James but with Hank O'Neal, who humorously adds that "it seems almost all the men [Barnes] knew were, as she calls them, 'pansies'" (64).

<sup>28</sup> Ann Martin offers the most thorough reading of this scene and its many hermeneutic options, which include (beyond the homoerotic) sexual undertones of bestiality and of incest. Martin points to the wolf's figuration of the fairytale grandmother as a potential biographical allusion to Barnes's own "probable experiences with incest or sexual abuse within her unconventional family unit" (120). Phillip Herring's biography devotes a chapter to the "bawdy letters" exchanged between Djuna and her grandmother, Zadel, and to the controversial nature of their relationship (57).

important irony of pre-WWI modernism which is its tendency, on the one hand, to devalue society's far-reaching investments in the innocence market while, on the other, appreciating substantially from its re-invention of innocence in the way of new and newer forms. While *The Turn of the Screw* thematically decries so much handling of innocence by its characters, James heralds his own grasp of its newest aesthetic variation — his creation for the novel of a *tabula rasa* (what he openly terms a “blank”) interior.

In the midst of modernism's long denouement, Barnes returns to the bed of immortal innocence not to renew the spirit of modernism but to lay both to rest. Nora Flood comes to the doctor's apartment seeking a secondary child-healer to replace the primary child/lover of the novel, Robin Vote, whom she has recently lost. And she also comes seeking a different method of healing, a narrative cure to help her understand her broken life and somehow to reassemble the pieces. Barnes writes, through Nora, the modernist longing for narrative reassemblage, as she writes, through Robin, the expansion of innocence to art, but her own narrative, like the doctor's, refuses to answer either the call to cure or the call to aesthetic transcendence. In the same way that O'Connor is both a doctor and a charlatan, is both a child and a parody of childhood, *Nightwood* too is modernism and its mockery. Often called a “transitional” text, *Nightwood* is a late modernist novel that takes as its subject the compound features of invention, innocence, and resistance, all together more commonly witnessed at the level of modernist form, so as to shift the lens (itself changed in the process) of unconventional critique onto modernism itself.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Nightwood*'s transitional status, between modernism and postmodernism, is a point, in fact, of rare consensus in *Nightwood* scholarship. Louis F. Kannenstine describes Barnes as a “transitional writer” whose approach is so intensely and “willful[ly] depersonaliz[ed]” that she must be placed in a broader tradition spanning at least “the early innovators of this century and the later generations of experimental

The associations between early modernist form, the new, and youth have been well-established.<sup>30</sup> For James it is clear that the features of childhood consciousness and innocence function acutely as models for new methods of aesthetic perception. The “new lights” of James’s governess and of the novella’s tagged narration are the bifocular product of retooling child perception for the presbyopic adult. The modern mechanism of sight figured iconically by the flâneur, at once in the midst and detached from the urban scene of modernity, is tied in the definitive accounts of Baudelaire and Benjamin to the appropriation, in part, of a kind of child perception. In the seminal “Painter of Modern Life” Baudelaire describes the central components of the modern artist: part flâneur and part child. Because “childhood sees everything in a state of newness,” Baudelaire perceives that the “genius” of the modern artist “is nothing nor less than *childhood recovered at will*” (8). Benjamin writes in the notes for *The Arcades Project* that “the task of childhood” is “to bring the new world into symbolic space,” a space at least partially emblemized by the “dialectical fairyland” that is the flâneur’s experience of Paris.<sup>31</sup> Not surprisingly the new optics of childhood shows itself most overtly in the early visual arts

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writers” (xvii). Jane Marcus also famously recharacterizes *Nightwood* as “making a modernism of marginality” (223), of participating in a revision of modernism by its “hysterical heteroglossia” that renders it very nearly “postmodern” (222). Carolyn Burke similarly describes Barnes and Mina Loy as two women who “wrote as ex-centric or outsiders” to the period, recalling Linda Hutcheon’s theorization of postmodernism as similarly “ex-centric.” And most recently (and most substantially), Tyrus Miller theorizes “late modernism” as a precursor to postmodernism and devotes a chapter of that study to Barnes.<sup>30</sup> Pound famously coined for the era the mantra to “Make it New,” but though often retroactively applied, the expression appears at its earliest in the *Cantos* of the thirties and then more prominently as the eponymous title of Pound’s 1934 book. The relative lateness of the expression within the modernist period is worth emphasizing since Pound’s sense of the phrase actually bears more in common with Barnes’s than otherwise might be acknowledged. Kurt Heinzelman writes of the etymology of the expression and particularly of Pound’s use of it that it signifies most the spirit of restoration and revision characterized by “acts of archival retrieval” and translation than by anything like absolute or “unsponsored originality” (133).

<sup>31</sup> What would ultimately grow into the idea for the unwieldy and unfinished *Arcades Project* began first as an idea for a 1927 newspaper article before it was transformed into the intermediary idea for the essay to be titled “Paris Arcades: A Dialectical Fairyland.” I have quoted here from this title (873) and from the unfinished notes (390). See also Eric L. Tribunella’s recent essay on “Children’s Literature and the Child Flâneur” and Margaret R. Higonnet’s “Modernism and Childhood: Violence and Renovation.”

of the period. Not only was actual child art featured at numerous exhibitions but the perceived imaginative, free, and formal play of that art was a wholly acceptable or even ideal model for the likes of Roger Fry, Picasso, Klee, Miró, Kandinsky and others.<sup>32</sup> And then there are the tenets of Futurism which develop the influence of youth on modernist art into an explicit ideology. The 1910 “Manifesto of the Futurist Painters” not only addresses itself to a youthful audience but demands, through them, that modern art must “Make room for youth, for violence, for daring!”<sup>33</sup>

In the realm of narrative, Peter Brooker notes of early modernism that “Examples of sexual, social and cultural innocence or ‘unknowingness’ occur frequently,” and he names such texts as Ford’s *The Good Soldier* (1915), *What Maisie Knew* (1897), Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Conrad’s *Chance* (1913), and *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) in which youth and innocence (particularly at the level of narration) play enduring narrative roles (40). Though Brooker does not make the point, this choice of texts (and authors) certainly also illustrates a central paradox of these early modernist novels which is their creative and emergent pairing of the innocent subject with the ironic method. As with the Futurist merger of youth with violence, or with the avant-garde correlation of the child’s novelty with the nonnormative resistance of modernist art, these texts should also stand as a check against the impulse to regard either modernism’s sense of innocence or its concomitant theory of innovation as one-note or, perhaps most especially in the case of its fiction, as unironic. The role and the influence of innocence for modernism, even from the outset, has been inseparable from the period’s sense of childhood and of its

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<sup>32</sup> The collection, *Discovering Child Art: Essays on Childhood, Primitivism and Modernism*, edited by Jonathan Fineberg, includes essays on each of these facets and figures.

<sup>33</sup> 184. Again, Higonnet’s essay provides an especially in depth analysis of Futurism’s relationship to youth.



attendant innocence as a problem, even if that problematic is ultimately viewed, as it was by many, in an affirmative light.

What has been most overlooked is the way that late modernism returns to the innocence-new paradigm so well remarked as central to the period's emergence. To be clear, it is not that the question of modernism's relationship to the new has fallen out of view, it is rather that its association with the child and with innocence has. And yet it is a striking fact, for instance, that so many important figures of modernist poetry and prose turned, typically much later in their careers, to writing not just about children but for them. Carl Sandburg, W.E.B. Du Bois, T.S. Eliot, Countee Cullen, Gertrude Stein, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Djuna Barnes are all examples of this remarkable trend.<sup>34</sup> Most common among late modernist theories of the new is an apocalyptic view that seems, on the surface at least, to repel the early ideals of child art, let alone any late productions of modernist work intended for children. Most prominent and most accepted of these late modernist theories of the new is Theodor Adorno's postulate that the new begins for modernists by and large as a negative concept (an idea directed more at what modernists knew they did not want rather than at any particularly positive image of what they did) and becomes, by this system, a theory for the traumatic

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<sup>34</sup> For some of these writers like Sandburg and Du Bois the shift to children's literature came presciently in the midst of modernism. The bulk of modernism's children's literature arose, however, under the more widely populist umbrella of the thirties and beyond. T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* appeared in 1939, a year that also saw the publication of Stein's *The World is Round*. Langston Hughes published a number of works for children, among them, *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (1932), *Popo and Fifina: Children of Haiti* (1932) — with Arna Bontemps, and a series of fifties *First Books*. Countee Cullen, a.k.a. Christopher Cat, wrote *The Lost Zoo* and *My Lives and How I Lost Them* in the early forties. Gwendolyn Brooks's concerted turn toward writing for children began in the 1950s. And Djuna Barnes spent the last years (and perhaps decades) of her life completing a bestiary for children, *Creatures in an Alphabet* (1982), which has unfortunately only recently been recovered for academic interpretation (see Caselli 2001) after Barnes-biographer, Andrew Field, dismissed it as "a sad end" to her career (244). And though a thorough reading of this work is beyond this paper's scope, acknowledging it as part of a larger modernist trajectory and as one that can be traced, with Barnes, at least as far back as the peculiar child narratives of *Nightwood* might suggest that this late turn is less unbefitting than has been conventionally thought.

and perilous recycling of negation without meaningful or moral substance. The dangers of what Adorno perceives in hindsight as having always been a negative ideology are borne out, for him, in the totalizing embrace of the new represented by fascism and the second world war. Newness “sought for its own sake” in this view mushrooms into an inescapable and neurotic cycle of perpetual erasure, unbound at last, in life as in art, to any sense of principled rationality or morality (236). Indeed, Adorno could be describing James’s “blank” method in *The Turn of the Screw* when he characterizes the origins of the modern “cult of the new” in the works of Poe and Baudelaire. In each, he writes, the subject would prefer to greet the unknown, potentially evil, “abyss” of the “new,” “a *blank* space in consciousness,” rather than continue to live in a society that “enmeshes and assimilates equally” all objects and perspectives (235; emphasis added).

Adorno reevaluates the tendency toward a utopian synthesis of modernist novelty and restores, concomitantly, a sense of ambivalence to the modernist embrace of the new. On the other hand, Adorno’s perspective does not clearly account for the possibility of the late modernist work’s own internal assessment and response to this modernist problem. Implicitly, this is a deficiency that Jameson seeks to address in his reading of William Carlos Williams’s *Paterson* as a text aesthetically designed, from the outset, “to fail” (5). But Jameson’s application of Adorno is one self-professedly designed to qualify, not to replace, a “Utopian” modernist template.<sup>35</sup> My own view is that late modernism proves to be not only methodologically self-reflexive (as would appear to be

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<sup>35</sup> Jameson writes that by applying, in part, Adorno’s insights on modernism’s negative view of the new he “hop[es] . . . to avoid at least some of the reification implicit in the conventional positive lists of strong features and realized aspects,” implicitly acknowledging the extent to which his view, unlike Adorno’s, will hold to the “conventional positive” view of modernism (5). But then, as Tyrus Miller observes, Jameson only “grudgingly” “admits” the potential need for a distinct theorization of what Charles Jencks first called “late modernism” (10).

the view of Jameson) but that it proves to be ontologically self-reflexive as well. In its increasing turn either toward actual child readers or toward psychologically complex and often dystopic depictions of child life, modernism arrives at a revision of itself, one that appears to recognize the limits of the text, of the child, and of the ideology of the new. In turning the lens of modernism onto modernism, *Nightwood* performs and forecasts a change in the lens itself, from youthful detachment and resistance to a revisionary perception embodied in (not merely or chiefly appropriated from) childhood.

*Nightwood*, it seems to me, is a work of late modernism (unlike Jameson's "Utopian" reading of *Paterson*) that meets Adorno on his own terms and, in so doing, lays the groundwork for theorizing these shifts. In its especially dark synopsis of late modernism and in its 19forties context and tone, Adorno's view and vantage point bear a remarkable resemblance to Barnes's own. Though set in the 19twenties, *Nightwood* is a product of the depressive and reactionary thirties. Centered on its pages are the social marginalia whom the Nazis would target for annihilation — the Jew, the homosexual, and the nomadically strange — those whose lives were already subject to social and historical suppression, or what Barnes terms "the immense disqualification of the public" (N 11). While there is much that is arguably new in *Nightwood* — like its postmodern population of characters — Barnes, like Adorno, proves deeply skeptical of the ideology of the new. In other words, there is little in *Nightwood* that is both new and affirmed as such.<sup>36</sup> Though the novel has been read as an affirmation and rebuke, respectively, of

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<sup>36</sup> In many ways this represents the condensation of an implicit debate between the second wave of *Nightwood*'s critical resurgence, which read the novel (largely through the lens of identity politics) as an affirmation of sexual liberation, feminist and queer identities, and carnivalesque social transformations, and the one currently underway, which has repeatedly taken this former set of readings to task by shoring up evidence for the novel's darker, dystopic, and self-critical discursive practices. Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank* and *Silence and Power: A Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes*, edited by Mary Lynn Broe, and including, most especially, Jane Marcus's controversial "Laughing at Leviticus: *Nightwood* as Woman's

society's underworld oppressed and its daytime oppressors, explicitly the sun has already set in *Nightwood*.<sup>37</sup> This is not to say that there is no room for reading normative resistance in the novel, but it is to say that its primary critical lens is directed towards the characters themselves, who have all come, at the time of the novel's opening, to be majority participants in their own dispossession. Though O'Connor identifies as a Catholic woman, mother, and wife, he cloaks himself in the doctor's garb: not as a healer, life-giver, or sustainer, but as an abortionist. Felix Volkbein is a Jew who identifies as a Christian Baron. Nora Flood, who plays mother and host to the underworld's needy, "robs herself for everyone." Jenny Petherbridge, the novel's most notorious "squatter," makes a home for herself out of the stolen lives of others. And Robin Vote is the quintessential "lost land [within] herself," whose emptiness is like a Siren's song for all those who would seek to fulfill themselves through her (42).

Neither those who theorize *Nightwood* as a transitional text against and away from modernism nor Adorno who appears to theorize the impossibility of such a transition includes a discussion of late modernism's relationship to childhood or to its attendant innocence.<sup>38</sup> This is not surprising since these are concepts (unlike those of

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Circus Epic" are cornerstones of the first order. The readings of Georgette Fleischer, Karen Kaivola, Robin Blyn, and Dianne Chisholm (among others) exemplify the recent countertrend, arguing respectively for the religious degeneration, sexual differentiation, freak show decadence, and profane illumination of the novel.

<sup>37</sup> In addition to Benstock, who sees the novel as a critique of patriarchy rendered through its debased internalization in the novel's characters, and Marcus, who argues that the novel represents a critique of fascism by affirming the lives of those whom that movement would come to target, Merrill Cole and Carrie Rohman are two recent critics who view the novel as offering similar kinds of critiques against historical master narratives (in the case of Cole) and against humanist (read: imperialist and masculinist) discourse (for Rohman) in favor, rather, of the "unspeakable" desires (Cole 395) and "nonlinguistic" animal subjectivity (Rohman 57) figured for the novel by Robin. Andrea L. Harris makes a similar argument about *Nightwood*'s thematic interest in the "third sex" and its own narratological inversions. Barnes, Harris writes, takes the "classical binary oppositions governing Western thought and inverts the hierarchies, privileging the feminine term: the night, the irrational, the unconscious, the improper, the anonymous" (65).

<sup>38</sup> Daniella Caselli's *Improper Modernism: Djuna Barnes's Bewildering Corpus* comes remarkably close to making just this argument, though Barnes's corpus alone, as the subtitle makes clear, appears to embody the category of an "improper modernism." But Caselli makes significant strides to read Barnes's own

bourgeois capitalism and consumerism for instance) which continue to harken backwards as well as forwards, to call forth the conservative conventions of the past as well as the spirit of self and social re-invention. But this paradoxical burden of old and new is precisely the grounds upon which modernism, early and late, has staked a claim to childhood. In *Nightwood*, childhood is at once the muse of immortal innocence, and it is the seat of so much dispossession. Despite this remarkable juxtaposition, most of the assessments of innocence in this novel stick surprisingly close to home base — to its conventional territory in the child and in nature. But images of innocence in animals and in children are quickly supplanted in *Nightwood* with images of their artificial replacement: by the doll, the toy, the circus, and by art.<sup>39</sup> Robin is the living, fictional figuration of each of these, and as such she is not just the blank center of innocence within the novel but she represents likewise modernism's blank method for making innocence new. Out of a resistance to the nineteenth century's push to immortalize childhood and its innocence, modernism creates its antithetical likeness in its own push to lasting formal innovation, but it also comes, in *Nightwood*, to write the story of this problematic inheritance and to theorize its own embattled relationship with the new vis-à-

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preoccupation with innocence in relation (and in distinction) to the broader contours of modernism. She argues both that Barnes's work "consistently sabotages novelty in favour of anachronistic recuperations of previous literary ages" (2) and that *Nightwood*'s refusal of "linguistic innocence" (160) makes the novel a "dangerous book" that exists as "a shameless and self-assured effrontery to modernist purity" (170). I find Caselli's close readings of Barnes to be among the most persuasive when it comes to the categories of childhood and innocence even though the category of modernism, I think, becomes rather too two-dimensional as the foil for Barnes's impropriety.

<sup>39</sup> David Copeland makes explicit overtures toward a reconsideration of childhood innocence in *Nightwood*. He begins his argument by rightly objecting to the conventional assumptions of innocence that are brought to the novel, but by the end his goal seems to be not to overturn those assumptions but to make them nonassumptive — that is to provide evidence for them. His own assumptions are that all of the actual children in the novel are representatives of innocence, and his subsequent claim that only these child characters possess true, authentic innocence in the novel hardly seems unconventional. Similarly, Copeland's definition of innocence that "it clearly suggests unknowingness, inexperience, and a blessed unawareness" epitomizes the conventional senses of the term (125). In fact, what Copeland truly takes issue with is the unconventional reading that Robin is innocent (in some form or fashion) and what he seeks to prove is that she, by conventional definition, cannot be because she is, first and foremost, not a child.

vis the child. Without innocence, without beauty, with nothing new, Dr. O'Connor's own child narrative enters (critically unnoticed — or so it seems) *Nightwood's* second half as a second, (post) modernist child alternative: to replace the innocence narrative of the first, to write the end of Robin, of modernism, and of the novel itself.

**Innocence Re-Invented (“She Will Make An Innocence for Herself”):**

All that seemed shocking in *The Turn of the Screw* — the ominous portent of the ghostly, the potential darkness of childhood, the mental anguish, isolation, and potential madness of the adult caretaker, the illness and the death — all are commonplace in *Nightwood*. And in this way, *Nightwood* takes over very much where *The Turn of the Screw* leaves off. It is not just that one ends in the exile of the interior subject and the other begins there, it is that they each end and begin with the particular image of the child evicted from childhood. The dispossession that kills Miles at the end of *The Turn of the Screw*, is the primary inheritance of *Nightwood's* first child, Felix. Guido Sr.'s gifts to his son are the twin degradations of “impossible ambition” and “impermissible blood,” for Felix is caught between the impossibility of re-inventing himself as a Christian aristocrat and of accepting himself as a Jew (4). Though Felix's is not the predominant narrative of *Nightwood*, it is primary. The coincidence of his birth and the novel's inception, of his “Bow Down” in a chapter named after what was the original title for the novel, suggests that the trajectory of dispossession and degeneration for each, for the figure and the form, begins in childhood.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> In the restored, original version of *Nightwood* used throughout this chapter, editor Cheryl J. Plumb glosses the history of *Nightwood's* title which changed from “Bow Down” to “Anatomy of the Night” to “Through the Night” to “Night without Sleep.” Plumb also corrects Fields' biography on the final title, which he credited to T.S. Eliot. A letter dated 23 June 1935 from Barnes to friend and editor, Emily Coleman, clearly restores the credit to Barnes: “‘Nightwood,’ like that, one word, it makes it sound like night-shade, poison and night and forest, and tough, in the meaty sense, and simple yet singular, . . . Do you like it?” (qtd. in Plumb viii).

In addition to Felix, there are two other actual child characters in *Nightwood* whose fates are echoes of his. There is Guido, Jr., son to Felix and Robin Vote, who like his father before him loses his mother at birth. As Hedvig Volkbein, in the instant before her death, “thrust” the newborn Felix from her (3), so does Robin, in the event of Guido’s delivery, feel herself “delivered” of him (44). As he grows up, it becomes clear that Guido will continue the downward momentum of his patronage. In Guido’s mental and physical deficiencies, Matthew O’Connor perceives the culmination, which is also the end, of “the modern child,” overladen with a double burden: to carry the past and to create the future. Like “the last child born to aristocracy,” often given to madness, O’Connor observes that Guido embodies the fallen, faltering mortality that necessarily follows his family’s aristocratic farce; “we go up,” he counsels, but we also “come down” (38). Like Guido and like Felix, *Nightwood*’s other child character, Sylvia, also seems unmothered and displaced. Though the novel calls her a “little girl,” it does not treat her as one (98). Dr. O’Connor describes her as he describes himself: as a child with “eyes wide open” (81; 89). And like just about every other adult in the novel, she has the unfortunate experience of being seduced and abandoned by Robin. A girl of unknown origins, Sylvia appears on the scene as one of Jenny Petherbridge’s many collected and co-opted relations, but unlike any other object or person in that collection she proves expendable, and the last we hear of her is that she has been brought to Jenny’s house in order that Jenny might flaunt Robin’s predictable, sudden coldness toward her.

That the novel portrays its child characters as strangers to childhood does not mean that childhood is itself dead in *Nightwood*. Far from it, the truest testimony of the child’s dispossession is represented in the novel by her/his replacement. There are many

more figurations of childhood in *Nightwood* than there are actual child characters, and chief among these is the figure of the doll, which ironically and tellingly makes its first appearance in relation to an adult. In the costume that has become her self, the trapeze artist, Frau Mann “seemed to have a skin that was the pattern of her costume . . . . The stuff of her tights was no longer a covering, it was herself; the span of the tightly stitched crotch was so much her own flesh that she was as unsexed as a doll. The needle that had made one the property of the child made the other the property of no man” (12). As with the other circus performers in *Nightwood*, Frau Mann’s exterior, public life is emphasized as being definitive of her. Like the doll, she is portrayed as being hollow. The dress and the form, stitched together, are all that there is to either figuration. And both are figurations in turn of dispossession. The passage’s description of the doll as “the property of the child” following a description that as clearly aligns it with the adult, only underscores the fact that this object, as with much else in *Nightwood*, has been stolen. And in the process it has become impossible. Having usurped the costume of childhood, Frau Mann becomes one of the novel’s many “squatter” figures. As one who does not recognize the principles of possession, she in turn becomes “the property of no man.”

More than the child, the accoutrements of childhood prevail in *Nightwood*. The doll, the toy, the fairy tale all make many more and many more apparently lasting impressions than do *Nightwood*’s actual child characters. Robin, we are told, can spend entire days playing with “her toys, trains, animals and cars to wind up, and dolls and marbles and soldiers” (122), toys that make an important reappearance as objects laid by her at the altar in the final, controversial chapter where she “goes down” with Nora’s dog



in a derelict chapel. Rather than the child to whom she gave birth, Robin mothers a doll — first with Nora and then again with Jenny. But, as with Frau Mann, the doll in these instances is not so much the representation of the child but the representation of his/her negation. On her failed relationship with Robin, Nora reflects: “We give death to a child when we give it a doll—it’s the effigy and the shroud; when a woman gives it to a woman, it is the life they cannot have, it is their child, sacred and profane” (118). The doll and the toy, by their features of figuration, by their literal lack of an interior, and by their immortality, represent, on the one hand, adults’ attempts to preserve childhood innocence and to immortalize their own relationship to it, but, on the other, they represent the direct antithesis to the child: actual, sentient, and mortal.

If the doll gives death to the child, *Nightwood* breathes life into the doll in the figure of Robin Vote, far and away the novel’s most remarkable and most enduring figuration of childhood and of innocence (the two, as shall soon be discussed, do not necessarily coalign). Robin is repeatedly characterized in child-terms. In the reader’s first encounter with her she is the “born somnambule . . . meet of child and desperado” (34). For Felix she possesses the attraction of the “density, not of age, but of youth” (101). For Dr. O’Connor Robin represents “a sort of first position in attention; a face that will age under the blows of perpetual childhood” (112-113). Nora confesses that she “saw [Robin] always like a tall child who had grown up the length of the infant’s gown, walking and needing help and safety” (121). Contextualizing each of these assessments of Robin as child is a reflective ambivalence. In the first, the unconscious innocence of the sleepwalker like that of the conventional child is undercut by the intensity, intent, and possibility for collateral damage in the image of the desperado. Though Felix had

imagined Robin's as an innocence bound to past traditions, he realizes in hindsight that hers is an unnatural innocence of her own making. For O'Connor, Robin's open-endedness seems to suggest, as equals, the possibilities for beauty or destruction. His image of her combines, as analogous, the "first position" of the ballerina and the readiness "in attention" of the soldier. And Nora, heart and head full, finds herself at odds with Robin, incapable of empathy and free to "go anywhere, do anything" because she effortlessly "forgets" the bonds that Nora cannot help but "remember" (126).

The attested desperation, density, perpetuity, and length of Robin as child in the passages cited above suggest not just an excess but a hoarding of childhood in her. Many scholars have discussed the innocence at the heart of Robin's character, but these discussions almost invariably reference hers as an "animal innocence," a tendency that implicitly, I believe, seeks to reconcile the dominant connotations of the word "innocence," which the novel applies to Robin in so many ways, with the clear sense of Robin's coldness, which the novel just as unavoidably attaches to her. Phillip Herring characterizes Robin's as an "animal innocence" because she lacks both memory and conscience (209). Teresa de Lauretis similarly argues that, from the point of view of Matthew O'Connor, "Robin embodies the sensual innocence of animals unfettered by civilized morality . . ." (125). And Georgette Fleischer argues that Robin "achieves" a "fearful primitive innocence," pagan in its worship of a 'dog'-likeness that is 'god' and its/his/her reverse signification (426). In addition to simplifying the role of the animal in *Nightwood*, these accounts are also substantially incomplete, for Barnes often pairs the animal with the child, the beast with the human.

Although Dr. O'Connor reflects on Robin as animal when he says "Ah...to be an animal, born at the opening of the eye, going only forward, and at the end of the day, shutting out memory with the dropping of the lid," this oft-quoted passage is neither as wistful as it might seem nor as isolated. In dialogic context, the expression builds upon O'Connor's preceding image of Robin as one whose face "will age only under the blows of perpetual childhood" and whose "temples" are "like those of young beasts cutting horns, as if they were sleeping eyes," a set of images which he immediately extends and modernizes via their primitivist imitation in the crowning fashion of the elite: to adorn their heads in the haute couture of "feathers, flowers, sprigs of oat, or some other gadget nodding above their temples!" (113). In sum, O'Connor not only links Robin's innocence to the child and to the animal, but he extends both in parody to their modern, primitivist appropriation.

As with *The Turn of the Screw's* governess, the preservation of innocence in Robin takes many contorted forms, only a handful of which are in fact restricted to what has been characterized as the primitive type. Robin's innocence is depicted in both child and animal terms, but it is, more often highlighted in its hybridity, as the innocence of the doll that "resembles but does not contain life" (123), and of the "beast turning human" (36). The latter references Robin but in doing so it also connects her to a majority of the novel's animals. Robin is the kindred first of the circus lioness who visibly gravitates toward her; then she is the bird that roosts in Nora's heart and turns scavenger upon it (76); and last she is the dog in church who finds and forces her mirror image in Nora's hound. Each of these animals is, in turn, similarly represented as a beast-human hybrid. Nora observes that all of the circus animals "going around and around the ring, all but

climbed over at that point” where they passed Robin, and the lioness in particular reaches toward Robin through the bars of her cage, and “her eyes flowed in tears that never reached the surface” (49). This latter image is especially striking in that it suggests an inversion of the beast and human stereotypes in the lioness whose body is that of a predator but whose soul (to use a term that Barnes herself used with regard to animals) contains a most complex emotional depth. Indeed, the novel’s closing image of Nora’s hound invokes a similarly reversed or mirror image to Robin’s own. When Nora and her hound come upon Robin in the derelict chapel, Robin goes down before the domesticated dog as if she were herself his wild ancestor. Cornered and “trembling,” the hound is said to be “troubled to such an agony” by what he sees that he actually attempts at first not to imitate Robin but to counter her. The narrative that describes her “going down” and “coming forward” toward him, describes him “rearing back” and “seem[ing]” to “ris[e] from the floor” in a futile effort to escape her (139).

### **Modernism Within — Robin and the Modernist Innocence Narrative:**

What the horns turning headdress, child turning doll, and the beast turning human have in common is the shift toward artifice. Robin is less a hybrid figure of child and adult, of animal and human, than she is a symbol of the modern metamorphosis of one to the other. In her the stereotypical assumptions of each are pushed to dramatic and performative excess. Robin is less the child than the modern, artificial substitution for childhood. Her habitat is not the wilderness but the circus, not the jungle but the streets of Paris and the bedroom. The reader’s first encounter with Robin, where she is described as one “meet of child and desperado,” is often cited as the evidence of Robin’s jungle-roots. Robin, it will be recalled, is passed out on her bed, and O’Connor has been called (and he

has brought Felix with him) to attend to her. Barnes writes that “the perfume that her body exhaled was of the quality of that earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry...her flesh was the texture of plant life...about her head there was an effulgence as of phosphorous glowing about the circumference of a body of water,” and if this were all that were written of her, this ‘jungle book’ might be closed (34).

But far from completing the image of Robin, this description acts, almost literally, as the setting of the stage for the performance/narrative that follows. Barnes’s discursive backdrop shifts from the jungle to the set:

Like a painting by the *douanier* Rousseau, she seemed to lie in a jungle trapped in a drawing room (in the apprehension of which the walls have made their escape), thrown in among the carnivorous flowers as their ration; the set, the property of the unseen *dompteur*, half lord, half promoter, over which one expects to hear the strains of an orchestra of wood-winds render a serenade which will popularize the wilderness. (34)

The description repeatedly alludes to the post-impressionist paintings of Henri Rousseau and seems to re-enact, more specifically, *The Dream* of 1910.



This last of Rousseau's modernist paintings was acclaimed (and criticized) for its "collage-like" composition of heterogeneous plants, animals, people, and furniture to form an inauthentic image of the jungle more reminiscent of the exaggerated jungle scenes in children's books or of those arranged on public display at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris (which Rousseau frequented) than anything in nature (37).<sup>41</sup> Of course, *The Dream*'s most striking juxtaposition lies between the painter's studio and the jungle scene. The female nude posing on the studio divan, "so terribly 1830," might have been airlifted into the middle of a jungle set.<sup>42</sup> The painter, likewise, appears to find his double in the figure of the enchanter, who stands just right of center with her instrument, which, it is suggested, has been the internal witchcraft to mirror the external magic of the artist, that has compelled the mystical juxtapositions of this scene.

Barnes not only replicates Rousseau's painting in this introduction to Robin but she also replicates his modernist method. She, like him, merges the Parisian woman, the drawing room, and the jungle, and she likewise imbeds the voyeuristic mechanism of the scene. Felix and the doctor, like the lions and the elephant in the painting, seem eager to disguise their gaze. Felix, literally, "step[s] behind the palms" and peeks through, quite like the lion in the painting. The doctor also, quite like the snake charmer, turns the encounter into a magic show, becomes "a man of magic" and makes some lipstick, perfume, and money disappear. Barnes, like Rousseau, also reveals the extent to which the entire scene has been fictively arranged. Each work is self-consciously revealed as an

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<sup>41</sup> For a further discussion of Rousseau's and "The Dream's" sources and reception see Christopher Green's "Souvenirs of the Jardin des Plantes: Making the Exotic Strange Again," from which I have quoted here, as well as Frances Morris's "Jungles in Paris" and "Mysterious Meetings," all in the collection *Henri Rousseau: Jungles in Paris*.

<sup>42</sup> This was the comment of one mocking reviewer in *Le Petit Journal*. Quoted in "Mysterious Meetings," 157.

elaborate “hoax,” in which “the whole fabric of magic has begun to decompose” (to quote Barnes on this scene) before our very eyes (35). Robin is no more a genuine embodiment of the jungle than she is a true embodiment of childhood. In her, child and animal, each becomes less something represented or embodied than a spectacle of representation and embodiment. Indeed, it is worth noting that part of the method of the painting and its narrative double is to turn the tables of primitive alignment. In the painting, the artist is self-depictingly more primitive than the Parisian woman who seems to have been transported unbeknownst to her into someone else’s dream, and in the narrative it is the onlookers, Felix and the doctor and Barnes, and perhaps the reader as well, who most resemble the native elements in the painting and who most seek the voyeuristic anonymity that the jungle set affords.

In both cases Barnes emphasizes that Robin’s innocence is a feature of modernity, “popularized” and commodified. The novel’s repeated substitutions of the doll for the child clearly signify this shift but so does its allusion to the paintings of Rousseau where the jungle can not be separated from the studio, where the matter within the painting can not be separated from the means and materials of its reproduction and reception. While James was careful to separate the modernist form of innocence from the story of its cultural excess, *Nightwood* self-consciously addresses both. While *The Turn of the Screw* tells the story of an epistemological crisis of innocence, an innocence multiplied and rendered uncertain by a vast historical accumulation of ideals and ideologies of childhood, the problem of innocence in *Nightwood* is notably the problem of its newness, of its ability to be invented and to be diversely embodied not only by the animal and the child but by the social and aesthetic remanufacturing of each of these. Unable to find

someone “to tell her that she was innocent,” Robin sets about “mak[ing] an innocence for herself” (99-100). She embodies the commercial figuration of child and animal, but she also and most ironically embodies the process of figuration itself. Robin is the doll and the circus, but she is also, as exemplified by her Rousseau connection, a modernist work of art.

Though Robin is the central figure of *Nightwood*, she operates within it very much like the Jamesian blank in *The Turn of the Screw*, not simply because they both construct spaces of uncertainty and ambivalence but because they each function as a peculiarly preserved innocence at the core of and around which the entire narrative apparatus is arranged. In an argument that could be applied nearly verbatim to the children of *The Turn of the Screw*, Karen Kaivola has observed that Robin “can be whatever we want her to be: mysterious, erotic, infantile, dangerous” in part because she so rarely represents herself in thought or in speech but is rather almost invariably (and of course so often) represented by those in proximity to her (175). For a figure of such novelistic stature Robin is, like Miles and like Flora, astonishingly silent. Horner and Zlosnik note that Robin speaks “no more than ten times in the novel” (85). And while many, including Kaivola, have placed this silence in the frame of Robin’s presumed animality, it is also a feature that aligns her not just with the childlike but with the novel’s sense of her as a living work of art. In addition to her unconscious slip into the posture of a Rousseau painting, Barnes describes Robin elsewhere as “a ‘picture’ forever arranged” (36) and in another instance as “an image” like the “stop the mind makes between uncertainties” (93). When Joseph Frank famously described modernist fiction as operating by a series of spatial fragments more akin to the modernist painting than to



anything synonymous with narrative temporality, he, by his own account, was responding to the particularly “haunt[ing]” experience of reading *Nightwood*.<sup>43</sup> Brian Glavey, who recovers this important fact about *Nightwood*’s critical history, also highlights the ways that the novel self-consciously embodies this central modernist modality within the “queer ekphrasis” of Robin’s persona, one which is, he argues, distinctly modernist for its irresolvable resistance to interpretation — both by the many lovers who would control her and by the novel’s readers who seek to understand her (757).

In so many ways, Robin is the allegorical embodiment of the modernist innocence narrative. From one vantage point she is the primitivist jungle child, from another she is the consumer capitalist doll, and from yet another she is the avant-garde narrative assemblage of a fragmented ekphrasis that is not only irresolvably queer, as Glavey argues, but which is also, in its foundational uncertainty, perpetually and repeatedly new. If *Nightwood* acts by a narrative resemblance to modernist painting, as Frank suggests, then Robin might be the novel incarnation of a kind of cubist blank slate, figuring a resistance to the epistemology not only of narrative temporality but also of visual perspicuity. As Glavey points out, Robin’s anti-narrative persona — spatial and nonlinguistic — is not precisely visual either. Robin is aesthetically visualized (as photograph, as painting, as statue) but hers is a hollow, concealed, and shifting interior that eludes likewise the hermeneutics of the visual register. Glavey likens her to a “black hole,” but this metaphor, while tonally apt, is nonetheless insufficient and obviously

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<sup>43</sup> In 1981 Frank reflected that his “preoccupation” with spatial form “was never abstract or theoretical,” focused as it was on an effort rather “to say something helpful and enlightening about” the “particular work” of *Nightwood* (qtd. in Glavey 755). It is not surprising that *Nightwood*’s role in the formulation of Frank’s highly influential theory of the modernist aesthetic would be missed since, as Glavey elaborates, its original “lengthy exegesis of *Nightwood* was left on the cutting room floor, an amputation repeated ever since” (755).

anachronistic. Blankness, as shown both by James's ambivalent blank method and by Adorno's concept of the blank abyss, is dark enough for modernists, early and late. Indeed, Barnes herself offers a similar view in proximal language. In a tongue-in-cheek review of, then friend, Charles Henri Ford's *The Young and Evil* (1932), she writes: "Never to my knowledge, has a certain type of homosexual been so 'fixed' on paper. Their utter lack of emotional values—so entire that it is frightening; their loss of all Victorian victories: manners, custom, remorse, taste, dignity; their unresolved acceptance of any happening, is both evil and 'pure' in the sense that it is unconscious" (qtd. in Herring 175).<sup>44</sup> For Barnes, Ford represents what she would herself begin to represent only a year later in the first drafts of *Nightwood*—the late modernist configuration of a youth so definitively characterized by the features of "lack" and "loss" and "unconscious[ness]" as to be at once "pure" and "evil."

Whereas the governess in *The Turn of the Screw* signifies the horrifying fruition of so many "Victorian victories" with regard to innocence by preserving it across the ages (both historical and individual), Robin represents the fruition, as troubling, of a modernist dream of innocence, abstracted from history and time and circumstance. Just as the governess's quest to preserve innocence is arguably too attached to and too haunted by the deeply imbedded historical and cultural accounts thereof, Robin's is too much an innocence of detachment and invention; her narrative is too much one of narrative resistance. Time and time again Barnes couples the sense of Robin's mortal and maturational resistance with a powerful suggestion of its futility and error. Not only does Robin capture the "eternal momentary" but she is also one in search of the "'indecent'

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<sup>44</sup> This is one of many homophobic remarks attributable to Barnes. Though her relationship with Thelma Wood was no secret, Barnes never identified as a lesbian, and she repeatedly took issue with the characterization of *Nightwood* as a lesbian novel.

eternal” (130); “Like something dormant,” Robin’s youth is “protected” and “moved out of death’s way by the successive arms of women” who make of themselves tombs, museums, roosts, and living hosts for her parasitic preservation (57).

Of Robin’s preservation in Nora, Barnes writes:

Love becomes the deposit of the heart, analogous in all degrees to the ‘findings’ in a tomb. As in one will be charted the taken place of the body, the raiment, the utensils necessary to its other life, so in the heart of the lover will be traced, as an indelible shadow, that which he loves. In Nora’s heart lay the fossil of Robin, intaglio of her identity, and about it for its maintenance ran Nora’s blood. Thus the body of Robin could never be unloved, corrupt or put away. Robin was now beyond timely changes, except in the blood that animated her. (50-51)

Indicative of *Nightwood*’s “analogous” style, metaphor in this passage overlaps with metaphor such that Nora is all things preserving — tomb, sustenance, museum, and artistic medium — for the all things preserved of Robin: body, artifact, and aesthetic artifice. Metaphors of the living and the dead — of the beating heart and the tomb; of “the body of Robin” and its empty imprint — so intermix that the body becomes immortal by its emptiness, and (more ironic still) the heart becomes a hollow for its keeping. The images of Robin as fossil, artifact, or as intaglio art, all sustained by Nora’s blood, invite a series of still more tacit analogies of her to the child in the womb of the mother or, more sinisterly, to the living dead figure of the vampire. Rather than read these seemingly contrary models as an either/or hermeneutic choice, I take the passage, as with its metaphors of the living and the dead, to offer an intermixing of the two. Its unsettling tone is in part the by-product of this “indecent” concoction. Yet we have seen this strangely ominous child seductor before, for Robin takes us back (once again) to Peter Pan, “gay and innocent and heartless,” except in this case Barnes takes heartlessness to graphic new heights, for Robin achieves perpetual, “never” to be

“corrupt[ed]” innocence, by drawing for her immortality (literally and figuratively this passage suggests) upon the loves and lives of others.

Formally, this passage is striking for the way that it suggests a microcosmic extrapolation of interiors within interiors. There is Robin’s interiority, Nora’s, Robin’s within Nora’s. And by implication each of these interiors and compound interiors is duplicated within the novel’s own interiority, for the novel likewise contains (as a start) Robin’s and Nora’s, and now Robin within Nora, each and all as so many concentric rings of interiority; each and all marked by a hollowed holding of so much emptiness. Like Nora, the narrative works by containing and sustaining the image of Robin without any direct or substantive reference to her, either in thought, action, or voice. Having said that, it would be a mistake to equate the novel’s relationship to Robin with Nora’s.<sup>45</sup> Despite her biographical and even textually internal resemblances to Barnes and/or the narrator, Nora is not an unproblematic figure for the text. The relationship between Nora and Robin is, though central, far from a subject of novelistic embrace. This relationship, though everything to Nora, is at best half of *Nightwood*. The other half, the other child, and the other narrative option comes in the form, figure, and voice of Dr. O’Connor.

Phillip Herring has observed that “much of *Nightwood*’s humor is an insensitive probing into the grotesque ways in which people deny nature and create themselves anew” (206). For Nora and Felix in particular, Robin acts as a beacon for such transformations. At one point Nora comments that Robin “was like a relative found in a lost generation,” and though some have resisted reading this as a modernist allusion, it

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<sup>45</sup> The most significant instance of this error actually comes from Barnes’s friend and editor, Emily Coleman, who repeatedly beseeched Barnes to edit down the roles of Felix and O’Connor, feeling that they detracted from the core subject of the novel, the relationship between Robin and Nora (or, for her, between Thelma Wood and Barnes). Coleman’s objections to Barnes are paraphrased by Plumb (xvi-xvii); her objections, recorded in her own diary, are paraphrased by Herring (203-204).

strikes me as yet another of Barnes's many layered analogies, referencing the manifold aspects of Robin's appeal — the sense of hers as a hollow, "lost" interior; of her invitation to an immortality forged by a rift in the chronological fabric; of hers as a peculiarly detached subjectivity, signifying her appeal to outsiders as the ultimate outsider; and, related to all of these, of her as the embodiment of something centrally modernist (129).<sup>46</sup> Though Nora and Felix each perceive that, with Robin, "anything can be done," their attraction to her is specifically drawn out from a desire to resist the narratives that have been written for them (by history, by culture, and by biology) and to write, upon the blank slate that she figures for them, new narratives of self-fashioning (37). These characters come to Robin then not only as to a narrative of self-fulfillment but as to, what Robin herself embodies, a complicated narrative of self-resistance and re-invention.

For Nora in particular the refusal to let Robin go is evidence of her reluctance to part with this narrative. Dr. O'Connor's late half question, half plea to Nora — "Can't you let any of us loose?" — points with its general plurality beyond Nora's difficulty in accepting the loss of Robin to her more profound difficulty in letting go of the method, signified by Robin, of resistance itself. Rising to the pitch of desperation in the novel's penultimate chapter, "Go Down, Matthew," together Nora's hold and O'Connor's plea echo the crisis at the end of *The Turn of the Screw* where the governess as frantically holds the child, Miles, who likewise as desperately begs to be "let go." Given Robin's pervasive associations with innocence, the resemblance between the two endings is more

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<sup>46</sup> Plumb offers the gloss on this line that "it is unlikely that Barnes had in mind here Gertrude Stein's statement to Hemingway that his was 'a lost generation,' though Barnes herself belonged to that generation," but provides no further explanation as to why such a connection is "unlikely." Since Hemingway himself published the comment as an epigraph to *The Sun Also Rises* in 1926, it was certainly in public circulation well before Barnes wrote *Nightwood*.

than a little striking. The governess's hold on Miles seeks a preservation not just of the child's innocence but of her relationship as the safeguard to it. The same is no less true in this case where Nora's own identity has become bound up with her role as the museum/tomb/heart for Robin's keeping. However, to the extent that Robin signifies an unconventional innocence and even an innocence that is specifically modernist, what Nora holds and the novel's own manner of containment (of holding Nora's holding) necessarily diverge from their Jamesian predecessor. The problem, explored by James in *What Maisie Knew* as in *The Turn of the Screw* and elsewhere, of the "child in the midst" of an increasingly corrupt adult order is duplicated in *Nightwood*.<sup>47</sup> And indeed the phrase itself is echoed in depictions of Guido and Sylvia — *Nightwood*'s actual child characters.<sup>48</sup> But the more pressing problem for this late modernist text is not the child but the child's aesthetic alter-ego. The child in the midst gives way in *Nightwood* to a modernism in the midst. What Nora holds on to as for dear life is not simply and not even the child per se in Robin but the modernist innocence narrative that she has come to figure so profoundly for her.

### **Late Modernism and the "Adult"eration of Childhood:**

"Go Down, Matthew" is structured as a dialogue between Nora and Matthew O'Connor, but by the end true conversation has been supplanted by what might best be

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<sup>47</sup> The phrase appears in an 1892 Notebook entry where James plans out a series of illicit relationships, between Maisie's original parents and her future stepparents, then between these stepparents, with each other, all "through the child — over and on account of and by means of the child," all, he concludes the entry, "with the innocent child in the midst" (127). But the idea reappears in nearly all of James's child centered texts, including *The Turn of the Screw*, "The Pupil" and *The Other House*, all of which, unlike *Maisie*, culminate in the death of the child at the hands, directly or indirectly, of surrogate adult caretakers.

<sup>48</sup> In *Nightwood*, as with James's fictional children, Guido and Sylvia find themselves at the center of strangely unfamiliar settings, cared for by strange and ominous parental surrogates. Guido has his father, but in the place of Robin, Guido finds himself in the shared company of Felix and Frau Mann — and in the place of home — he finds himself, with them, at the bar. Barnes writes: "Many cafés saw this odd trio, the child in the midst . . ." (103).

characterized as two competing monologues, each vying for discursive space. Nora's posture in the chapter is one of nearly compulsive writing and speech. "I don't know how to talk," she says, and yet "I've got to" (109). She is writing a letter to Robin, a new letter in an apparently unending series of letters. The doctor prophesies a vision of Robin "tearing open a million envelopes to her end" (106), but Nora laments again: "If I don't write to her, what am I to do? . . . I've got to write to her . . . I've got to" (106). Though the doctor has been the talker par excellence of the novel to date, Nora in this late exchange battles with him for this title. To his advice, his stories, Barnes describes her as at first somewhat politely having "not heard him" (113), but she becomes increasingly "unheeding" (116), later takes up her own narrative strand "as if she had not been interrupted" (117), and finally demands — "Listen . . . you've got to listen" — a plea that is ironic enough given her own unilateral approach to the conversation (128).

Though O'Connor is not (and nor does he pretend to be) a psychoanalyst, Nora comes to him as for a talking cure. Her turn to narrative modes eschewed by Robin, those of the written and spoken word, place her, on the one hand, notably at odds with the figure she seeks to recapture, but, on the other, all the signs point to her being as stuck, as frozen in these modes as her silent, blank, and positionless counterpart. Despite the doctor's punctuated refrain "to put down the pen," Nora cannot stop writing. Despite his plea, at last frantic, for her to simply "Stop!": to "be done," to "give up," to "rest," and again to "lay down the pen," Nora suffers from an inertia against these various ends as powerful as Robin's inert stance ever was. At the pitch of desperation, O'Connor retorts:

Oh . . . A broken heart have you! I have falling arches, flying dandruff, a floating kidney, shattered nerves *and* a broken heart! But do I scream that an eagle has me by the balls or has dropped his oyster on my head? Am I going forward screaming that it hurts that my mind goes back, or holding my guts as if they were

a coil of knives? Yet you are screaming, and drawing your lip and putting your hand out and turning round and round! . . . Oh, you poor blind cow! Keep out of my feathers; you ruffle me the wrong way and flit about, stirring my misery! What end is sweet? Are the ends of the hair sweet when you come to number them? (128)

More than the facts of Nora's experience, her misery and her loss — for these are facts which O'Connor shares — this is a diatribe against her relationship to them, particularly against her relationship to time: her way of looking backward, her resistance to the inevitable "end." Against time, against change, against mortality, Nora's posture is very nearly a caricature of protest. The image of her "screaming" and "drawing [her] lip" and "putting [her] hand out and turning round and round" emphasizes hers as a narrative petulantly and foolishly stagnant. Though Nora's is a narrative of excessive speech and writing (contra to Robin's), her words, like her letters, languish on the altar of the new, hoping by their perpetual starting over, by their unaltered repetition, or by their "turning round and round," to make life bend in the imitation of them, to create a world, like the one inhabited by Robin, full of the "eternal momentary," the immortally new, a world without an "end."

Dr. O'Connor summarizes both this effort and its futility twice in this chapter. First, he offers Nora the cautionary tale of Guido: "'Very well,'" he says, "'but know the worst then. What of Felix and his son Guido, that sick lamenting, fevered child; death in the weather is a tonic to him. Like all the new young his sole provision for old age is hope of an early death . . . So I say, was Robin purposely unspun? Was Jenny a sitting bitch for fun? . . . Can't you rest now, lay down the pen'" (107). Later, this sentiment resurfaces as aphorism: "Time is a great conference planning our end, and youth is only the past putting a leg forward" (109). O'Connor's reference to the "new young" casts a



wide net that includes the recently born (Guido) but most critically — for this is after all intended as a warning to Nora — the recently and endlessly reborn. Resistance is both a key feature in O'Connor's depiction of the "new young" and a signature ailment. Guido's illness and Nora's misery are both symptoms of the same problem, of an addiction to youth that is fundamentally at odds with the realities of time. Guido's innocence can no more win the battle against time than can Nora's pen rewrite the narrative that chance itself has already changed. What's more, each of these illnesses of youth share an analogous cure. For the one, O'Connor prescribes the "tonic" of death; for the other, he counsels a narrative cessation: a putting down of the pen.

Nora may not be persuaded either by O'Connor's mortal wish for an "end" or by his recurrent advice to "put down the pen," but the novel itself apparently is, for it draws rapidly and confoundingly to a close only pages thereafter. Indeed, O'Connor's allegorical voice in "Go Down, Matthew" is only a thinly veiled apostrophe from the author to herself. O'Connor repeats his wish for narrative cessation and further laments:

Oh the poor worms that never arrive! . . . Haven't I eaten a book too? Like the angels and prophets? And wasn't it a bitter book to eat? . . . And didn't I eat a page and tear a page and stamp on others and flay some and toss some into the toilet for relief's sake, — then think of Jenny without a comma to eat, and Robin with nothing but a pet name — your pet name to sustain her; for pet names are a guard against loss, like primitive music. But does that sum her up? Is even the end of us an account? (107)

One can no more miss the parallels between Nora's writing and Barnes's than one can miss the irony of O'Connor's pleas for an "end" to the story of Nora and Robin in the midst of a novel centered around its telling. Unlike many of the other passages in "Go Down, Matthew" which have a meta-narrative subtext, here the meta-narrative is primary. The only "pet name" we have for Robin is Robin, the bird name ascribed to her

by Barnes, not Nora. If Jenny starves for want of a comma, it is because Barnes (not Nora) has withheld narrative voice from her. But beyond Robin and Jenny, to whom Barnes had well-known biographical reasons for dispensing a certain amount of narrative poetic justice,<sup>49</sup> no one in this passage (and in the novel as a whole it suggests) escapes the purview of a kind of novel damage. Though some are starving for narrative, others like O'Connor are drowning in it.

The narrative that at first seemed grounded either in Robin's innocence method, frozen outside of time and language, or in Nora's attempt to preserve that same method across time and in language, has turned gradually and peripherally to O'Connor's counter narrative of narrative critique and (hopeful) cessation.<sup>50</sup> The choice for the textual object and medium of narrative, edited in part by that preeminent modernist, T. S. Eliot, destined for publication and circulation, would seem to be a default choice for immortality; the choice of the novel, in particular of the modernist context, would seem

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<sup>49</sup> Barnes was very open about the fact that Robin's character was based on her long-time lover Thelma Wood and Jenny on Henriette Metcalf with whom Wood began an affair in 1928. Wood and Barnes had been living together in Paris since 1922. Wood and Metcalf moved to America where they lived together until at least 1942.

<sup>50</sup> Though the first four chapters center, respectively, around Felix, Robin, Jenny, and Nora, the novel's next three and longest chapters see most of these figures in rotation, in conversation with the doctor. I am certainly far from alone in perceiving a narrative alignment between *Nightwood's* narrative method and the voice and method of Dr. O'Connor. Martin argues that Barnes's "manipulation of source texts and of language" is reflected in "Matthew's manipulation of fairy tales" (116); Ed Madden theorizes O'Connor as a queer Tiresias, who "stubbornly voices sexual and social difference" in the text (177); Cole names O'Connor as "*Nightwood's* historian" (393); and Chisholm grounds much of her reading of the "obscene modernism" of *Nightwood* in the doctor's "primary tactic of demystification . . . his shocking use of obscenity" (177). There are many, however, who take issue with this claim, typically on the basis of O'Connor's self-contradictions: that he represents a kind of mysticism even as he represents the demystifying impulses of the novel, that he evinces signs of homophobia and anti-Semitism even as he embraces and befriends gays and Jews. Miller, whose reading I otherwise find compelling, gets it wrong, I think, when he argues that O'Connor's "mystical mode, in tension with its uncanny double . . . is the last refuge of modernism's gesture of symbolic 'rescue' in *Nightwood*" (158). Rohman also does not like the contradictions of O'Connor's character, arguing that he "seems unable to practice what he preaches," a true enough statement that is only a criticism if one seeks to read the novel, as Rohman does, as a positive narrative of empowerment (77). Rather than dismiss the connection between the broader narrative and O'Connor on these grounds, I am rather inclined to see them as further evidence of their alignment under the theory of *Nightwood's* self-critical and self-defeating narrative method and stance.

likewise to signal an automatic choice for novelty. But neither is ultimately the case in *Nightwood* because *Nightwood* is, in the first case, a narrative that rejects the distinction between the imminent failures of its subjects and the craft of their conveyance. In the second, it is a novel that opts in the place of the modality of resistance (modernism's signature tool in the manufacture of the new) for O'Connor's prescription of narrative surrender. Though *Nightwood* contains the modernist innocence narrative — of forgetting, of aesthetic re-invention, of resisting time, of just resisting — it, by its own method, writes itself away from this paradigmatic approach. It cannot be said that *Nightwood* is silent as Robin is silent. That *Nightwood* is blank as she is blank. That it forgets as she forgets. If anything, *Nightwood* is far more an exercise in excess, in the appalling and obscene, and in allusive memory as far-reaching and as fabricated as O'Connor's own "prehistoric memory."<sup>51</sup> Nor can it be argued that *Nightwood*'s method, though not primary like Robin's, is secondary like Nora's, designed to linguistically contain, shield, and preserve what Robin represents, for *Nightwood* works in a space at least one concentric ring removed from this, is at least tertiary in its criticism of Nora's method of holding Robin as the equivalent of holding, worse than nothing, the host of nothing: a cadaver without a soul or a fossilized imprint without a source or a parasite with nothing to give in return.

*Nightwood*'s narrative departure marks a significant turning point both in terms of the innocence narrative and in terms of modernism's appropriation of it. The transitional

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<sup>51</sup> As Barnes simultaneously acknowledges and alters her own literary forebears, O'Connor intermixes the events of history with the stories of his own life. He relates in one instance how he personally took the leeches "to bleed" Catherine the Great. Even when the ex-priest admonishes, "Remember your century at least!" O'Connor insists that it is those who "look as innocent as the bottom of a plate that get you into trouble, not a man with a prehistoric memory," another apparent allusion to Robin, but also to the novel, which also crosses centuries in its allusions and which no one would mistake for such innocence (135).

works of Henry James demonstrate the ways in which modernism emerges in part out of a formal investment in the features of childhood. An exploration of the child's limited consciousness translates into a modernist method of conscious restraint in *What Maisie Knew*. The problem of preserving innocence becomes the key to writing the modernist narrative blank in *The Turn of the Screw*. But rather than appropriate the features of childhood innocence for the narrative form of *Nightwood*, Barnes constructs a method not just divergent but in opposition to it. Barnes's narrative of excess, conditional authority, impurity, and surrender serves as the counter and the critique to Robin and to the modernist innocence narrative that her character embodies. Alongside and really in the place of Nora's hallowed and hollowed containment of the blank interior that is Robin, the novel holds, without any such interior analogue, the narrative method and message of another — demystified and demythologized — child figure. Through the novel's containment of him, O'Connor becomes another kind of child within — the child to be accepted, not chosen, not created or invented, and definitely not preferred.

Though O'Connor speaks a debased, obscene, and fatalistic language, though he is the novel's only veteran of war, and though he is by his own admissions a charlatan and a liar, he is nonetheless *Nightwood's* other (in addition and in opposition to Robin) child replacement. In one of the novel's most important paradoxes, even though O'Connor disidentifies with "all the new young" like Guido and like Robin (whose resistance to age leads O'Connor to prescribe the "hope of an early death"), he yet identifies himself with childhood (107). If O'Connor strings a line between Guido, and Robin, and Nora, then he himself ties the knot between himself and *Nightwood's* other actual child character, Sylvia. O'Connor's plea to be let go is not only reminiscent of

Miles in *The Turn of the Screw*, but it is the more direct echo of hers. Stuck in a moving carriage with a brawling Jenny and Robin, “the child flung herself down on the seat, face outward, and said in a voice not suitable for a child, because it was controlled with terror: “‘Let me go! Let me go! Let me go!’” (67). O’Connor, also an entrapped onlooker to the scene, later emphasizes Sylvia’s expression as one “with eyes wide open,” (89) a description that echoes (only pages later) his own depiction of himself as “a child with my eyes wide open” (81). Then too, both sets of images, of Sylvia and the doctor, converge in the novel’s last, late-night bar image of O’Connor.

He began to scream with sobbing laughter. ‘Talking to me — all of them — sitting on me as heavy as a truck horse — talking! . . . Why doesn’t anyone know when everything is over, except me? . . . He came down upon the table with all his weight, his arms spread, his head between them, his eyes wide open and crying, staring along the table where the ash blew and fluttered with his gasping breath. ‘For Christ’s sweet sake!’ he said, and his voice was a whisper, ‘now that you have all heard what you wanted to hear, can’t you let me loose now, let me go?’ (136)

The Doctor’s eyes are again, as Sylvia’s have also been, “wide open and crying.” He flings himself down on the bar table, staring outward, much as Sylvia cast herself on the seat of the carriage. Both despair, but neither looks away. Sylvia faces the wrath of Jenny just as O’Connor faces and inhales the ash-strewn air. Her original “let me go” has become his. But unlike Sylvia’s (and Miles’s) cries for release, there is nothing in O’Connor’s pleadings that resembles resistance, nothing to suggest a desire for individual independence or freedom to counter the entrapment that has inspired its outburst. Quite the contrary, O’Connor identifies himself with the end of all narratives and with an acceptance of these ends.

Having lost the novel’s primary child/lover, Nora has come to O’Connor implicitly as to a replacement child healer. She confesses, “Sometimes I don’t know why

I talk to you. You're so like a child; then again I know well enough" (112). This hesitant, half playful admission, which O'Connor takes as a "compliment," is saturated with suggestion — not only that there are any number of reasons why one might want to or find it easy to talk to children but also and more importantly that O'Connor reminds her, in his resemblance to childhood, of Robin. In truth, O'Connor has always represented a replacement for Robin. After his narrative introduction, all of his signature chapters are framed by the quest of Robin's former lovers to find in him something to fill the void left by her. In the first of Nora's journeys to him, she is surprised to find in him a fairytale revision. The sight of him in drag in his appallingly cramped apartment inspires the revelation in her that "children know something they can't tell, they like Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed!" Even then, O'Connor signified a revision to the idea of childhood — aware enough to know the import of seeming otherwise. Here again, Nora has come to O'Connor as for the refreshing of one kind of fairy tale life only to meet in him the disillusioned retelling of another. Nora's love of Robin is a fairy tale love, imbedded in her longing from childhood, but it is also, O'Connor reveals, the product of "the sweetest lie." "We were impaled in our childhood," he tells her, upon the figure of the "invert," those androgynous figure of heroism, all those princes — half boy, half girl — "as they rode through our primers." That love, outside of the primers, outside of childhood, is a "long lie" turned inward to become the center and the destruction of the self (114-115).

The implication in O'Connor's narrative is that this version of the problem of the child within, the mythic ideal at odds with the realities of time and history and the body and age, has been replaced by another, by a demythologized childhood as wounded and

as flawed as its adult counterpart and future host. His child model, with “eyes wide open,” entrapped and pleading for escape, is so clearly the child of trauma, not the child of romance. There is no innocence in his child narrative. There is no sleep, no dreaming, no forgetting. He represents and he tells the story of the disillusionment that only the child can feel when s/he realizes that all the fairy tales have been a lie. His narrative, so unlike either that of Robin or of Nora or of Felix, is a mortal one. It moves not in the circles of resistance but in the direction of acceptance. With Felix and with Nora both, O’Connor is a doctor who heals most by trying to counsel the limits of healing. For some illnesses there are no cures. In O’Connor’s narrative there is no worship of the healed, the reborn, or the new but only a profound wish for an end. Though he has been at nearly every turn the novel’s replacement for Robin, he insists at last on being no substitute for her. There is nothing affirmatively new about him, nothing aesthetically pure or blank, and nothing certainly to be preferred or preserved as such.

And yet, by narrative quantity if not by thematic emphasis, *Nightwood* does prefer and does preserve him. Most strikingly, perhaps downright shockingly, this is true in the novel’s final images of Robin. The voices of Barnes and O’Connor converge once more in O’Connor’s final prophesy: His proclamation, “Now . . . the end -- mark my words -- now *nothing, but wrath and weeping!*” which is also the final sentence of “Go Down, Matthew,” serves doubly to announce some future Apocalypse and to introduce the ending of the novel. The “now” performatively, in fact, suggests that the two are one: that the novel’s last chapter will be the ending of which he speaks. The typographical flare of the sentence, the double dash and the italics, enact, as well, the author’s manner of underscoring his insight, literally “mark”ing his words and marking them also as her

own. That both she and O'Connor abstract the end before it has arrived, however, offers little help in interpreting the actual ending that follows. There might be wrath, if one interprets the chapter "old testament" style, and there is certainly weeping, but the novel's actual ending fails at the very least to deliver the combination of these sentiments that O'Connor's prophesy leads the reader to expect. And this is fundamentally the case because the Robin of the ending is to a great extent not the character that we or he or Nora has come to expect. Indeed, what O'Connor fails to foresee is the way that the final image of Robin going down with the dog will parallel himself.

Cornered, pursued by Robin around the narrow chapel, Nora's hound "let loose one howl of misery and bit at her . . . barking," then the novel's final paragraph tells us:

Then she began to bark also, crawling after him—barking in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching. Crouching, the dog began to run with her, head-on with her head . . . He ran this way and that, low down in his throat crying, and she grinning and crying with him; crying in shorter and shorter spaces, moving head to head, until she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her faced turned and weeping; and the dog too gave up then, and lay down, his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees. (139)

Aside from the ambiguous content of this passage, which has and which will no doubt continue to fuel countless readings of this novel, I want here to focus on the words, for they resound with a striking echo of O'Connor's last image, which was also, it will be recalled, itself an echo of the child, Sylvia. That first image of the child, "with eyes wide open," who casts herself down on the seat of the carriage, facing outward and crying "let me go!" ripples through the image of O'Connor screaming "with sobbing laughter," his body also bowed down (upon a bar table), his eyes also "wide open," and "crying," his voice beseeching "can't you let me loose now, let me go?" And now, it would seem, these ripples have reached all the way to Robin. She too emits a mixed laughter, "obscene



and touching” as ever O’Connor had been, her “grinning and crying” an unmistakable echo of his “sobbing laughter.” The hound’s howl, “let loose,” and her strange barking echo those calls that have preceded them — to be let loose, to be let go. Let him and let herself loose Robin apparently does, for she too “g[ives] up” and bows her body down, turns her face out in the gesture, like Sylvia’s and O’Connor’s before her, of a sad and yielding awareness. The dog’s “bloodshot” eyes mirror the open awareness of its child predecessors, and Robin, as O’Connor predicted, cries as they all have cried.<sup>52</sup>

As the central child figure of *Nightwood*, this is not the Robin we have come to know. Here the ekphrastic image, frozen in and outside of time, has succumbed; here everything has given up, from the rotting chapel to the dog to Robin herself. Here the “gay and heartless” innocence that made Robin so like that other child who never grows up has given way to anguish and “weeping.” Here the toys and the dolls that have always figured in Robin’s figuration of childhood have found their way with her to the altar of this ruinous chapel. And though this last image might be read as a sign of a continued innocence-idol worship in Robin, in the light of the final parallels to *Nightwood*’s other children, I read it more as a symbol of its sacrifice. All along O’Connor has acted as a figure for the replacement of Robin, all along his abundance of speech has served to fill the void of her silence, his awareness has colored in the features of her unconsciousness, his inability to heal and acceptance thereof has sought to diffuse her temptation to immortal re-invention. But now it is Robin who follows him, and what’s more the novel

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<sup>52</sup> The similarities between Robin, O’Connor, and Sylvia counter, to my mind, those readings of the novel which interpret *Nightwood* as affirming the narrative of Nora and Robin simply because it returns to them in the final chapter. See AnnKatrin Jonsson’s claim, for example, that this ending “suggests resistance” to O’Connor’s prediction at the end of “Go Down, Matthew” by giving “Nora and Robin’s relation . . . the final word” (274-275).

has changed its image of her: has remade her in the image of him, as it has made him in the image of a different kind of child.

*Nightwood* has from the outset been a story about the dispossession, not the death, of childhood, and it has been a story also of childhood and narrative revision. Though modernism emerged in part out of an examination of the former narrative of dispossession, formally, unconventionally much of modernism has itself participated in the dispossession of childhood. Miles's dispossession at the close of *The Turn of the Screw* is a horror and an outrage, but he is no less dispossessed by the narrative of his invention, which substitutes its own brand of aesthetic innocence for his. In part, this is also the story of *Nightwood* where, if anything, dispossession is the default for childhood, aesthetic re-invention a topical mainstay. But *Nightwood* moves away from the narratives of resistance and negation signified by Robin and characteristic of so much of modernism toward a narrative of revision predicated first and foremost on a difficult acceptance — whether of a marred past, a present loss, or an unwanted life. And it likewise moves away from one vision of childhood — youthful, innocent, and perceiving the world as with “new lights” — to a child recognizably mature in its disillusionment and seeing the world as with the blurred vision of one “with eyes wide open,” tear-filled, and weary. Both trajectories imagine a weakening of the line between youth and age, but where one seeks to carry an idea of childhood forward, the other seeks to shift an idea of adulthood back. Just as the preferred child for *Nightwood* is the characteristically unpreferred — the misfit, the orphaned, the betrayed and alone — so too *Nightwood*'s preferred method is not resistant, blank, creative, or original but archival in its memory, analogous in its style,

obscenely embodied in its discourse, and revisionary in its narratives of modernism and childhood.

There is no sense in *Nightwood* that the fairy tale form, with its formal stricture and imaginative freedom, would serve here as it so valuably served *The Turn of the Screw* at the turn of the century, but there is a sense in *Nightwood* that modernism might serve for children. In the place of happily-ever-afters, *Nightwood* suggests the need for child narratives of disillusionment; in the place of an imaginary erasure, *Nightwood* calls for a recognition and acceptance of what has already been written. The narrative of reverse continuity that *Nightwood* drafts from adult to child marks an important step in late modernism's shift from an ideology of aesthetic novelty to an ideology of ontological revision. The turn of many modernists, including Barnes, in the late thirties and beyond to produce a literature for children in defiance both of the conventions of that genre and of the expectations theretofore of modernism marks a notable next step on the path that much of late modernism was taking to revise itself vis-à-vis this revisionary child. After deriving much artistically from the ideas of childhood innocence and wonder, modernism shifts course in its declining years. Disillusioned with abstraction and novelty, many late modernist writers return to the source of subjectivity, to the child in the midst, as to a filling in of a double void. It is a shift that will be played out not only in the move of many of these authors to write for children but to revise also, in the process, their own past works and the spirit of modernism vested in them.

### Chapter Three:

#### The Children of Double Consciousness: From *The Souls of Black Folk* to *The Brownies' Book*

##### Being Divided and Being Double:

The unparalleled influence of W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) on modern African American literature has been well-established by Arnold Rampersad, Henry Louis Gates, Cheryl A. Wall, and others. As one of the first modernist texts by an African American, *Souls* famously juxtaposed and intermixed the genres of music and essay, poetry and sociology, memoir and history, and in so doing it not only spoke to the psychological, political, and daily complexities of being black in America but also inscribed that complexity into the form of its telling. Interesting and ironic, in the face of such catalytic ingenuity, is the comparatively slight influence which Du Bois's subsequent body of work — a body grew for another 57 years — appears to have had in literature, teaching, and scholarship. Many locate the waning interest in Du Bois's work in the narrowing aesthetic and political vision of the work itself. According to Rampersad, Du Bois's "slow but momentous" shift toward "the rhetoric of the militant propagandist" began just two years after the publication of *Souls* (94). And as Susan Wells surmises, "After the dazzling performance of *Souls*, Du Bois seldom attempted a form of address so complex . . . ." (123).

There are, of course, some notable exceptions. Wells herself proposes as one of them, following Paul Gilroy, Du Bois's *Dark Princess: A Romance*. Alys Eve Weinbaum has likewise argued that the form of the interracial romance, of which *Dark Princess* is the strongest model, is a crucial internationalist and anti-imperialist expression of "the

politics of juxtaposition” made famous in *Souls*. Lawrie Balfour makes a case for Du Bois’s essays, *Black Reconstruction* (1935) and *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), as extensions of the “experimental,” “trial and revision” paradigm so successful in *Souls* (18). And Eric Sundquist and Amy Kaplan both argue that Du Bois’s vision of a global color line, subtle in *Souls*, reaches “full flower” (Sundquist’s phrase) in the period after the first world war when Du Bois wrote *Darkwater*, a collection of essays and art, crafted and marketed as a direct successor to *Souls*. If there is strength in numbers, then these various exceptions coalesce into a powerful reformulation of Du Bois’s career post-*Souls*. Together, they illuminate a trajectory, only begun in *Souls*, that continued to shift and change and grow in the direction of a Pan-African, international, and anti-imperialist political aesthetic. Du Bois himself aids in this reassessment. Among the most influential ideas to come out of *Souls*, Du Bois’s conceptualization of “double-consciousness” and his prophetic announcement that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line” are also perhaps the most microcosmically fluid and reaching of all of *Souls*’s driving metaphors. Double consciousness is importantly for Du Bois an evolving awareness. The color line is a living line whose meaning Du Bois persists in re-evaluating long after the publication of *Souls*.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter I want both to resound the importance of taking a long view of Du Bois’s work and to add a heretofore overlooked set of texts: Du Bois’s works for children: from the annual *Crisis* Children’s Numbers, edited by Du Bois from 1912-1919,

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<sup>1</sup> Even before *Souls*, Du Bois had already begun to imagine the color-line in a global light. He titled an essay “The Color Line Belts the World” in 1906 but used that expression as early as 1898 (Kaplan 176-178). After the first world war, Du Bois increasingly reflects on that proclamation made “once upon a time in my younger years” to ask “how far was it prophecy and how far speculation?” (“Worlds of Color” 423). His conclusion in 1925 is not only that the color line continues to belt the world but that this imperial belt has tightened, precipitating suffering and violence on a global scale.

to *The Brownies' Book* (1920-1921), an unprecedented periodical for black children which Du Bois helped to found and to which he contributed the remarkable monthly segment, "As the Crow Flies."<sup>2</sup> Although there has been a tendency to read Du Bois's child-centered writings as part of his shift toward propagandist, pedagogical discourses of racial uplift, there is ample evidence to suggest that these texts, like *Souls*, resist the rigors of classification by inhabiting the uncertain regions between culturally conflicted genres, voices, and experiences.<sup>3</sup> More importantly, Du Bois's works for children prove to be crucial sites for the reworking of those central metaphors of *Souls*: the color line and double consciousness. While in *Souls*, Du Bois proclaimed, "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line"; by the time he writes *Darkwater* (1920), his emphasis has changed. Not only does he add the problem of women's uplift "next to" the problem of the color line (105), now he also writes, "All our problems center in the child" (125). Likewise, the double consciousness that begins in the "early days of rollicking boyhood" in *Souls* (4) returns and is reconfigured in Du Bois's works for children as a resilient, pragmatic response to this new problem of the twentieth century: the question of how responsibly to raise black children.

In 1897 Du Bois published the essay that would become the conceptual foundation for *The Souls of Black Folk*. In "Strivings of the Negro People," Du Bois introduced for the first time his use of the term "double-consciousness." But the term

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<sup>2</sup> Under the literary editorship of Jessie Fauset, *The Brownies' Book* (hereafter: *TBB*) published works by a range of important Black Renaissance writers including Fauset, Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, and Georgia Douglas Johnson.

<sup>3</sup> Elinor Sinnette's 1965 study of *TBB* focuses on the magazine's efforts to counter racial stereotypes and provide black child readers with emulative images and stories of black history and life that could not be found in popular American children's literature. Violet J. Harris agrees with Sinnette that replacing stereotypes with "authentic representations of African American life" is a central goal of *TBB* as part of its editors' "explicit appeals for racial solidarity, pride, and uplift" (547). Dianne Johnson-Feelings likewise describes the creation of *TBB* as "in essence, an experiment in pedagogy and propaganda aimed at African-American youth" (336).

itself was not original to him. Bruce D. Dickson has usefully traced its dual history through psychology and Romanticism to at least the early nineteenth century. While Du Bois was still a student at Harvard, William James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890) described the concept of double consciousness in a manner consistent with its psychological history as a pathological "mutation of the self," characterized by a "double" or "alternating personality" (379). For both Romantics and psychologists alike double consciousness marks a particular kind of problem. Indeed, what James's analogy helps to make clear is the extent to which the problem of being double is paradoxically synonymous with the problem of being divided. For the Romantics and Transcendentalists in America, the term had a long figurative history as a signifier of man's conflict between his worldly and transcendent, other-worldly, selves. For psychologists, it had a similarly extensive record as a term for diagnosing split personality.

Each of these conceptualizations plays a role in Du Bois's formulation of double consciousness as a characteristic feature of the black American experience at the "dawning of the Twentieth Century" (*Souls* 1). But rather than collapse doubling into division, Du Boisian double consciousness swings the pendulum the other way, acknowledging the potential for simultaneity in the place of alternation, for the compound in the place of the conflicted, and ultimately for resilience in the place of disorder. From the outset, double-consciousness is both the expression of a problem and a response to a problem of expression. Du Bois prefaces "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" with an epigraph from "The Crying of Water" by the Welsh decadent poet Arthur Symons and with the musical bars of the spiritual, "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen." The first

is an apostrophe to the “unresting water” which cries to a speaker who “lie[s] and listen[s]” and yet “cannot understand,” the cry which is nothing less than the “voice of” his own “heart.” The second speaks to the lack of a compassionate community on earth but rejoices in the transcendent and omniscient bond between man and Christ. Each speaks, out of very different traditions, to the failures of communication and compassion. Each is echoed in Du Bois’s own opening revelation: “Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question . . . How does it feel to be a problem?” (3). There is an unasked question, and there is an unspoken response, for Du Bois likewise confesses that “To the real question . . . I answer seldom a word.” In all cases, then, the real effort to resolve the gap of understanding is in the poem, in the song, and, in this case, in the essay.

The articulation of double-consciousness is not only, like the poem, a step toward self understanding but it is also, like the song, an attempt at being understood in “the other” white “world.” Though he writes that “The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self,” I agree with Ross Posnock that the merger Du Bois seeks is not, precisely speaking, internal nor is it, precisely speaking, a merger (327). Du Bois himself clarifies the point, for “in this merging,” he writes that the black American “wishes neither of the older selves to be lost . . . He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American . . . .” (5). What Du Bois is calling for, of course, is democratic equality, and in this way he is seeking not greater simplification but greater cultural complexity. “Work, culture, liberty,—all these we need, not singly,” Du Bois writes, “but together, not successively but together, each growing and aiding each . .



. .” When Du Bois speaks of unity, he speaks not of two becoming one but of two, standing side by side. The “unifying ideal of Race” consists of America’s “two world-races,” black and white, living simultaneously and symbiotically in the public sphere, with equal opportunities and equal power (11). The problem, in short, for Du Bois is not double-consciousness so much as it is divided-consciousness, or a consciousness that is really best characterized by an absence of “two-ness” (5).

That there is a dream of double consciousness as well as a tragic reality of its division is highlighted by the transcendental and pathological range of the term’s history. In drawing upon each of these histories, Du Bois signals a double aim, to represent a history of sorrow, to speak for the experiences of the masses of “black folk,” and to raise that history and those experiences to extraordinary heights, to render them, as Dolan Hubbard argues, “a black sublime” (298) or to, as Dickson argues, convert them into a recognizably Romantic discourse (302). But in centering each in childhood, Du Bois also points to a conjoined revision and a double inadequacy in each of these strains. Neither extreme by itself, neither the romantic nor the impaired have a place in African American childhood as they have no place in a black progressive future.

In *Darkwater* (1920), Du Bois advises black parents that they “can no longer wholly shield,” the child when to do so is to produce “wayward, disappointed children,” and nor should they “realizing this, leave their children to sink or swim in this sea of race prejudice,” but they must rather chart a middle course, “between extremes,” characterized by “frank, free, guiding explanation” alongside “every step of dawning intelligence” (119-120). This sentiment is echoed in Du Bois’s nearly contemporaneous *Crisis* introduction to *The Brownies’ Book*, an effort which arises, he writes, out of the

realization that “To educate [our children] in human hatred is more disastrous to them than to the hated; to seek to raise them in ignorance of their racial identity and peculiar situation is inadvisable—impossible” (“True Brownies” 285). In the terms of the child’s self and social awareness, in each of these instances, Du Bois rejects either its excessive limitation or its excessive exposure, advocating instead one which more genuinely embraces the spirit of two-ness through a complicated, compromising program of guided exposure.

Du Bois’s understanding of the problem of a consciousness polarized and paralyzed and his pragmatic sense of a more enduring intermixed and hybridized course seated in childhood are each echoed and perhaps even arise through the distance he came to perceive between his own Berkshire youth and that of the majority of his race. In *Souls* Du Bois recounts that “It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation first bursts upon one, all in a day, as it were” of “being a problem.” And to this general claim, Du Bois puts the specifics of his own childhood experience:

I remember well when the shadow swept across me. I was a little thing, away up in the hills of New England, where the dark Housatonic winds between Hoosac and Taghkanic to the sea. In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys’ and girls’ heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards . . . and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows. (4)

Though Du Bois consistently rebuked the spirit of Romanticism as a child-rearing strategy, he represents his own childhood, from the “days of rollicking boyhood” to his sense of a transcendent “blue sky,” “fiercely sunny” mentality, in precisely those terms. The differences between this experience, which Du Bois offers, in part, as a model of

double-consciousness, and the more general, realist experience are suggested in the return to third person; “With other black boys,” Du Bois writes, “the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrunk into tasteless sycophancy, or into silent hatred of the pale world about them . . . or wasted itself in a bitter cry, Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?” (4-5). Du Bois slips uneasily from the general to the specific and then back again. The middle course charted by his own experience seems at last more digression than exemplification for when he resurfaces in broad strokes, it is to find that those “other black boys” have arrived elsewhere, or they have not arrived at all, having “wasted” themselves in despair. In this case, Du Bois’s use of a Romantic/Transcendentalist discourse does nothing if not emphasize the distance between his and the childhoods of “other black boys,” highlighting the extent to which his childhood, though imperfect, was nonetheless exceptional and the extent to which his experience of double-consciousness was similarly thus, for it came not with the curses and closed doors encountered by most.

These differences, subtle in *Souls*, are vastly magnified in Du Bois’s later childhood accounts in *Darkwater* and in his 1968 *Autobiography* (where much of what follows reappears with some variation). In *Darkwater* Du Bois begins, “I was born by a golden river and in the shadow of two great hills, five years after the Emancipation Proclamation. The house was quaint, with clapboards running up and down, neatly trimmed, and there were five rooms, a tiny porch, a rosy front yard, and unbelievably delicious strawberries in the rear” (3).<sup>4</sup> Here the boy of Du Bois’s memory is given a

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<sup>4</sup> In *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1968) this passage is interrupted by a description of the town and with a more historical account of the year of Du Bois’s birth, but the wording is the same (61).

fitting space for “rollicking,” a “paradise” of hills, rivers, roses and strawberries.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, until the age of adolescence, Du Bois professes in these recountings little race-consciousness.<sup>6</sup> More prominent among his memories are the divisions of wealth. He remembers in *Darkwater* “despis[ing] the poor Irish and South Germans, who slaved in the mills” and “annex[ing]” instead “the rich and well-to-do as [his] natural companions” (6). Though he acknowledges that his “brown face and frizzled hair must have seemed strange” to the townsfolk, “yet,” he writes, “I was very much one of them.” Even the shift to double-consciousness is described differently:

Very gradually, — I cannot now distinguish the steps . . . but very gradually I found myself assuming quite placidly that I was different from other children. At first I think I connected the difference with a manifest ability to get my lessons rather better than most . . . Then, slowly, I realized that some folks, a few, even several, actually considered my brown skin a misfortune. . . (6)

There are a handful of what might be termed minor discrepancies between this and the *Souls*’ account. In *Souls*, Du Bois “remember[s] well” the dawning of double-consciousness; in *Darkwater*, he “cannot distinguish the steps.” In *Souls* the dawning is “sudden” — it happens “all in a day”; in *Darkwater* it is “very gradual” — it occurs in “steps,” and it occurs “slowly.” At first, even, in *Darkwater*, Du Bois’s embryonic sense of double-consciousness is not tied to race but to intelligence, and indeed this sense seems to stay with him in both accounts in the manner of his academic defiance, his determination to prove his intellectual and righteous superiority. But what comes across at first only implicitly in *Souls* and then far more clearly in *Darkwater* is Du Bois’s sense

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<sup>5</sup> This description appears both in Du Bois’s *Autobiography*, 93 and in Du Bois’s 1938 speech (later published as a pamphlet) “A Pageant in Seven Decades: 1878-1938,” in *W.E.B. Du Bois Speaks: Speeches and Addresses, 1890-1919*, ed. Dr. Philip S. Foner (New York: Pathfinder, 1970) 22.

<sup>6</sup> In “A Pageant of Seven Decades,” Du Bois describes the sheltered “provincialism” of life in Great Barrington and writes of the various historical happenings of racial import, such as the passing of the Fifteenth Amendment and the death Charles Sumner and of the closing of the Freedmen’s Bank, that “of these things my little village said nothing” (23).

of his own childhood experiences as no real model for the lives of other black children. To return to the dual trajectories of double consciousness in the nineteenth century, Du Bois clearly stresses his own experience as part of the Romantic, Emersonian tradition of internal transcendence and spiritual supremacy in the face of earthly strife, but in writing his own experiences in this way, Du Bois also suggests their obsolescence to the present demands and overwhelming experiences of the majority of his race.

Du Bois's increasing concern with the widespread failure of education, what he came to identify as "the problem of problems" (*Darkwater* 114), goes hand-in-hand with his growing interest in what can be systematized in terms of child-rearing and instruction.<sup>7</sup> In turn, he comes to regard his own youth and success most unromantically through the lens of chance. Having grown up in something of a sheltered environment, in a small, isolated New England town, with a neighbor who paid for his books, with a principal who encouraged him to pursue a course of higher education, and with a community that helped financially to send him to Fisk, Du Bois's own education was the fruit of much generosity in addition to his own considerable will and innate ability. In returning to America from Europe, a period he called his "Days of Disillusion," he catalogues the accidents of his good fortune:

*Suppose* my good mother had preferred a steady income from my child labor rather than bank on the precarious dividend of my higher training? . . . *Suppose* Principal Hosmer had been born with no faith in 'darkies,' and instead of giving me Greek and Latin had taught me carpentry and the making of tin pans? *Suppose* I had missed a Harvard scholarship? *Suppose* the Slater Board had then, as now,

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<sup>7</sup> Derrick P. Alridge, *The Educational Thought of W.E.B. Du Bois: An Intellectual History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), attributes the pragmatic shift in Du Bois's educational philosophy during this period, a period which Alridge identifies as stretching from 1920-1940, to a broad range of contextual factors from "the world wars, the New Negro Movement, the Harlem Renaissance, the Great Depression, [Du Bois's] greater understanding of Marxism, and the vibrant social and intellectual environment of the Popular Front" (69).

distinct ideas as to where the education of Negroes should stop? Suppose *and* suppose! (*Darkwater* 9)

In retrospect, Du Bois imagines his life under ordinary circumstances. If convention had ruled the mentalities and actions of his family and community, would he have achieved the same degree or even the same kind of success? In a moment of confessed humility, Du Bois writes that he “began to realize how much of what [he] had called Will and Ability was sheer Luck!” (9). And in describing another similarly exceptional life, that of the famed black English musician, Coleridge-Taylor, Du Bois repeats the narrative of chance and arrives at a similar conclusion:

This young man who stepped forth as one of the most notable of modern English composers had a simple and uneventful career. His father was a black surgeon of Sierra Leone who came to London for study. While there he met an English girl and this son was born. . . .

Then came a series of chances. His father failed to succeed and disappeared back to Africa leaving the support of the child to the poor working mother. The child showed evidences of musical talent and a friendly workingman gave him a little violin. A musician glancing from his window saw a little dark boy playing marbles on the street with a tiny violin in one hand; he gave him lessons . . . .

So by happy accident his way was clear. (115)

The accident for Du Bois brings the individual and his circumstance to a cross-roads. Regrettably, it reveals and underscores the common limits of self-reliance and self-fashioning, but, more usefully, it highlights the systematic weaknesses in the present social sub-structure as well as the ideological errors upon which it is founded. Of the genius life of Coleridge-Taylor and implicitly of his own, Du Bois asks, “What is the real lesson” to be learned from such a life? (120). And he answers:

It is this: humanly speaking it was sheer accident that this boy developed his genius. We have a right to assume that hundreds and thousands of boys and girls today are missing the chance of developing unusual talents because the chances have been against them; and that indeed the majority of the children of the world are not being systematically fitted for their life work and for life itself. (120-121)

Though Coleridge-Taylor and Du Bois have led what many would consider ideal lives, neither is a ready model for others because neither can be systematically suited to the majority, but each, by the fact of their chance reality, points to the future possibilities for “hundreds and thousands” more. Though imperfect, both very nearly achieve the goal Du Bois describes as “self-conscious manhood” because both had the opportunity, in short, to “develop.” Each has risen, through the cracks of convention, to be recognized in his “two-ness,” as black musician or as black American scholar.

**The Crisis Children’s Numbers and the Dialogic Child:**

Introduced as a problem in *Souls*, the public articulation and manifestation of double consciousness are at the center of Du Bois’s work for and about children. Given the pervasive problem of a singular and antagonistic ontology that reduces black development to the undeveloped, Du Bois’s goal of “self-conscious manhood” begins paradoxically with a set of unconventional maxims and materials for the construction of a new and revised black child. As with many modernists, Du Bois faces a set of pervasive conventions of childhood, and, like them, he perceives a danger in the conjunction between childhood and interiority when what is internalized is innocence and singularity. But these dangers are far more imminent and real for Du Bois, where a race of men and women (but especially men) have been reduced through the lens of prejudice to a state of perpetual childhood. Lesley Ginsberg has documented the degree to which “justifications of slavery promulgated during the antebellum period were predicated on an increasingly literal analogy between the peculiar institution and the more familiar pattern of

subordination upon which the antebellum family was built.”<sup>8</sup> Black children were thereby often thought of as “pets” and the black man as a “child by his nature.”<sup>9</sup> The infantilization of black men and women was nowhere more apparent than in the “selective tradition” of early twentieth-century children’s literature, which, as Violet Harris has explicated, routinely “suggested that Blacks were inferior, happy-go-lucky, and childlike” (“Race” 192).<sup>10</sup>

Again and again, Du Bois confronts the problem of racial infantilization. In his chapter on “The Immortal Child” in *Darkwater*, he writes of the black man that his very existence for white society is a “‘problem,’” that, for them, “he should never be educated, for he cannot be educated”; in their eyes, he “should never have been born,” for his is imagined as an interiority incapable of growth (119). Elsewhere in this same text, Du Bois writes that the dehumanized and the infantilized meet in the black body of European theory, religious and secular justifications for slavery which posit “Darker people” as “of dark, uncertain, and imperfect descent; of frailer, cheaper stuff” as “fools, illogical idiots,—‘half-devil and half-child’” (24). And in a lecture contemporaneous with *Souls*, on “The Training of Negroes for Social Power,” Du Bois warns that the misperception which equates black Americans with a “child-race,” that thereby seeks to strip black men of responsibility, “to train these millions as a subject caste, as men to be thought for, but not to think; to be led, but not to lead themselves,” must logically back-fire, for “such a

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<sup>8</sup> Lesley Ginsberg, “Of Babies, Beasts, and Bondage: Slavery and the Question of Citizenship in Antebellum American Children’s Literature,” *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*, eds. Caroline F. Levander and Carol J. Singley (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003) 90-91.

<sup>9</sup> Qtd. in Ginsberg, 90-91.

<sup>10</sup> Given this, it is not surprising that Du Bois would direct a substantial part of his revisionist efforts toward black children. Dianne Johnson-Feelings, Elinor Sinnette, and Fern Kory have all described *TBB* as a consciously-constructed alternative, for example, to *St. Nicholas Magazine*, the most popular American children’s periodical of the era. For Kory, *TBB* can be read as “self-consciously ‘signifying’” on *St. Nicholas*’s patron figure with its tribute to the trickster Brownie as well as on an entire “unself-conscious” Eurocentric fairy tale tradition (92-93).



subject child-race could never be held accountable for its own misdeeds and shortcomings . . . above all, its crime would be the legitimate child of that lack of self-respect which caste systems engender.”<sup>11</sup>

Du Bois’s sense of conventional childhood and manhood as contrasting concepts resonated throughout many of his works, including *Souls*. And his calls for the recognition of a complex subjectivity, one beginning even in childhood, are addressed not only to the other white world but to black Americans, to black men and to black parents, especially. In his 1905 speech addressing the purposes of “The Niagra Movement,” Du Bois presents journalistic evidence for the double-standard that while “white men” in America are depicted as having heroically secured their rights as men “only after asserting the right and sometimes fighting for it,” where black men are concerned there arises the excuse that “A child should use other language.” In the face of this, Du Bois asks, “Are we not men enough to protest”? And as a prelude to J. G. Holland’s poem “God, Give Us Men,” he proclaims, “This is the critical time, black men of America; the staggering days of emancipation, of childhood, are gone.”<sup>12</sup>

One of the signature dangers of a romanticized notion of childhood interiority is its actual internalization, for while notions of perpetual childhood may fulfill nostalgic fantasies for white Americans, they construct overwhelming obstacles to progress for a people who seek to write a different future. As Caroline Levander has shown, America from its colonized beginnings identified itself with the liberty-loving qualities presumed of childhood as well as with its emblematic representation of the newly born nation-state.

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<sup>11</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois’s 1903 lecture “The Training of Negroes for Social Power,” in *W.E.B. Du Bois Speaks: Speeches and Addresses, 1890-1919*, ed. Dr. Philip S. Foner (New York: Pathfinder, 1970) 131 was the result, Foner writes, of the numerous invitations he received to further explicate his differences with Booker T. Washington, the most prominent and influential African American leader at that time.

<sup>12</sup> In *W.E.B. Du Bois Speaks: Speeches and Addresses, 1890-1919*, 148.

That the child-freedom bond was intimately racialized was revealed in America's own rationalizations for the enslavement of a people and of a children of another caste.

Levander cites John Woolman who in 1754 argued for the abolition of slavery on precisely these grounds — that it has no innate logic but only a superficial one. To prove his point, Woolman offers a hypothetical case, asking his reader to imagine an orphaned “white child,” who “comes under the power ‘of a person, who endeavors to keep him a slave.’” So sure is such a case to provoke a “sense of outrage,” in readers “otherwise untroubled by the idea of the ‘many black [who] are enslaved’” that Woolman can draw the conclusion “‘of slavery being connected with the black colour, and liberty with the white.’”<sup>13</sup> Many modern notions of childhood excluded black children. Woolman's critique reveals the degree to which the American majority imagined the ideals of liberty and of democracy as interdependent with the preservation not just of childhood but of whiteness.

For Du Bois, on the other side of “the color line,” the perspective is, not surprisingly, quite different. For him, freedom is not symbolized in the child but in the man. And, indeed, in *Souls* Du Bois makes the radical substitution of the “darker ones” as the “true[st] exponents of the pure human spirit of the Declaration of Independence,” in the place of the nationally recognized symbol of American liberty, the white child. And yet, though Du Bois calls, in one sense, for an ideological end to childhood, proclaiming that “the staggering days of emancipation, of childhood, are gone,” in another, socially realist, sense, he models a new and revised attention to the African American child. In the October 1922 Children's Number of *The Crisis*, Du Bois once more expresses concern

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<sup>13</sup> Caroline F. Levander, “The Child and the Racial Politics of Nation Making in the Slavery Era,” *Cradle of Liberty: Race, The Child, and National Belonging from Thomas Jefferson to W.E.B. Du Bois* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 29.

for the misapplication and misinternalization of the romantic child ideal with regard to black children. He wonders “how many are being regarded” by their parents “as negligible playthings” and chastises the “new mother” who “dresses . . . up” her children “like living dolls” (“Infancy” 250; “The Children” 247). Lesley Ginsberg has documented the degree to which slavery was justified using “an increasingly literal analogy” between the slavery and structures of domestic subordination. Black children were thereby often thought of as “‘pets in the house,’” and the black man as a “‘child in his nature’” (89-90). And Robin Bernstein extends this argument into post-bellum America and into bourgeois consumer culture where racialized dolls became the special, indestructible targets for a permissible, “innocent,” virtual violence against black Americans. In this instance, Du Bois may well be drawing upon the loaded historical weight of misconceptions of black people as dolls or “negligible playthings” in order to stress the particular dangers of replicating this dynamic within the African American community and home. To the “grown-ups” who “think of little children as ‘cunning,’ ‘pretty,’ ‘cute’ and ‘amusing,’” Du Bois offers the correction that “our jails are full of children who once were unbelievably cunning” (247). Though the tone is quite different, the terms of the critique, here in *The Crisis* as in *Darkwater*, are the same. The threat of childhood to black children is dehumanization (whether as “subject caste” or as “negligible playthings”), and dehumanization threatens to become its own self-fulfilling prophecy.

On the heels of this scorching rebuke, Du Bois makes a case for the conservation, not of childhood, but of adult rationality and autonomy. In contrast to the “many and singularly different ideas” of childhood, from the child as “bond slave,” “automaton,”

“Item of Expense,” or parental “personal adornment,” Du Bois offers what “few people think of,” that is, “the child as Itself—as an Individual with the right and ability to feel, think and act; a being thirsty to know, curious to investigate, eager to experiment.”<sup>14</sup> The child subject Du Bois addresses, far from being even a mirror of his parents, is to be more complex, for he is to have guidance where they did not. Du Bois’s case is not only thusly explicit, but it is conveyed powerfully as well via its performance. In choosing the Children’s Number as the space not only to address children but to address their parents about them, Du Bois invites a child reader who will be privy to the methods of his own upbringing, who will be doubly-conscious in the sense of knowing himself as a child and knowing himself as his parents see him. Du Bois fosters the construction of a meta-perception in childhood, a layered interior aware of its own scripted part as well as of the totality of the play in which he figures. For Du Bois such awareness seems vital to the aesthetics and politics of self-fashioning, to casting new and revisionary models of subjectivity. Du Bois extends the point even further because, given his chastisement of the conventional parental position, his child reader is situated at a double remove, being at a vantage to view not only his parents’ perception but also the magazine’s (and its editor’s) perception of their perception of him. In other words, the child reader of *The Crisis* Children’s Number is envisioned with the potential for knowing, and perhaps then

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<sup>14</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Opinion of W.E.B. Du Bois: Childhood,” *The Crisis* 24.6 (October 1922) 250. Though Du Bois’s conception of the child as “little man” is, as his own assessment attests, unconventional, it is hardly new. Over two centuries prior, John Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), in *John Locke: Some Thoughts Concerning Education and Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, eds. Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996, sought to make a similar case. It was Locke’s argument that the qualities so cherished in the modern man, namely reason and liberty, were likewise to be valued in childhood, for “children,” Locke argued, “have as much a mind to show that they are free, that their own good actions come from themselves, that they are absolute and independent, as any of the proudest of you grown men, think of them as you please” (51).

of traveling, a path other than the one he is presently on and other than the one his family has laid for him.

In a move parallel to his treatment in *Souls* of “the problem of the color line,” in this 1922 piece on “Childhood,” Du Bois writes of the relationship between parent and child as one in need of democratic revision. To the discovery of some parents that they “must teach,” “must persuade,” and “must direct” the child, Du Bois offers the corrective amendment that,

. . . if they are honest they soon learn that in a duel between two human wills even though one is four and the other forty, there is information to be imparted on both sides; and that youth can teach age some things; and that persuasion is a game that two can play; and that Experience, great as it is, is not all. Many people begin with trying to teach and persuade and end by commanding in anger, “instant” obedience, leaving the child with a tremendous and never-to-be-forgotten sense of being wronged and cheated. Only God’s Few take this dialogue between Age and Childhood seriously and give to it as much time and money and study and thought as they give to their clothes and houses and horses (252).

Du Bois’s claim here has two parts. The first is to acknowledge the needs of childhood: for patience, for education, for monetary support. The second is to make the more controversial claim for the needs of age. Experience, money, and power are “not all.” Youth, too, has something to “teach.” The dialogic exchange, what he terms “this dialogue between Age and Childhood,” is nearly identical to the argument laid out by Du Bois for the black American’s struggles in the Reconstructive Era. The former slave, suddenly free, is triply “handicapped”; he feels “his poverty,” feels “the weight of his ignorance,” and feels too “the hereditary weight of a mass of corruption from white adulterers, threatening almost the obliteration of the Negro home.” As “the child of Emancipation,” he needs no less than the actual child, financial footing, education, and equally as important to these, he needs time. “A people thus handicapped,” Du Bois

writes, ought not to be asked to race with the world, but rather allowed to give all its time and thought to its own social problems” (*Souls* 9). The white world, like the figures of “Age” in the *Crisis* Children’s Number, is too quick to criticize, to berate, and to withdraw from a recognition of its own responsibilities and imperfections. In addition to the basic needs of the newly emancipated, stands Du Bois’s, again more controversial, claim for the far deeper wants of white culture, wants, painted by Du Bois as “a dusty desert of dollars and smartness,” that can be met by the “sole oasis of simple faith and reverence” embodied in the “souls of black folk” (*Souls* 11-12). In both cases Du Bois’s aim is to democratize the hierarchical divide — to offer a critique of those on high and to articulate for the low an interiority approaching self-conscious manhood.

Though the conjuncture between the child and the black man was always figurative, it was nonetheless extended along a rational front, one which sought to apply the temporary, physical dependencies of childhood with innate permanence onto the black race. In ascribing the dialogue of race difference to the opposition of age, Du Bois follows this subjective logic in reverse. For Du Bois to suggest a commonality between the child and the black man that even exceeds the surface layers of dependency and reaches down to, as he imagines it, a shared struggle with a widespread denial of theirs as sophisticated and valuable inner selves is to suggest that the principles of democracy have not only been violated by the enslavement of black men and women and children but that a parallel violation has occurred and occurs in the homes of the most privileged Americans. Far from thinning Du Bois’s investment in the color line, the addition of age to the dialogue of race thickens his sense of what can distinguish and lend distinction to black Americans. Attaching the child to the black man is a move, for Du Bois, to further

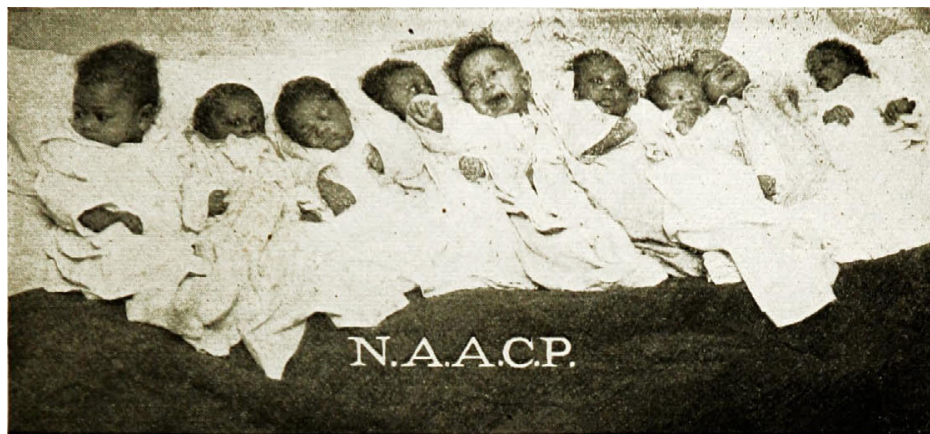
illuminate the dwindling democratic spirit of white America and to further strengthen the new seat of the democratic ideal in the black community and in the black home.

As the author of *Souls*, Du Bois sought to convey a multitude through the polygeneric form of the essay. As the editor of *The Crisis* Children's Number, he coordinates his often polemical editorials as one voice and one generic approach among many. More than the typical monthly issues, the Children's Number organizes itself around polarities, or representations of sharp distinction. Beginning in 1912, prior to the *Brownies' Book* premier in 1920 and Effie Lee Newsome's "Little Page," which became a staple in 1925, the child aspects of the Children's Number under Du Bois's editorship were rarely separated within isolate compartments but were interspersed throughout and within the magazine's other compartments. Most popular was the visual interspersal of photographs of black children — usually very young toddlers or infants — submitted by *Crisis* readers. The intertextual layout of these images varied from issue to issue and within the issues themselves. Often there is at least one page entirely devoted to displaying as many baby photos as is possible. Also common is the use of photos as departmental headers.



*The Crisis* 16.6 (October 1918) 282

Some issues frame sections with photos. The October 1914 “Opinion” is lined with a series of three photos at the top and bottom of several of its pages. It is possible that these may have been, for the most part, haphazard selections, as Du Bois claimed for the photo selection process as a whole,<sup>15</sup> but certainly there are sections where the choice of the child heading is ripe with intent. One example is the October 1919 article, titled “Chicago and Its Eight Reasons,” about the race riots of that year, headed with a picture of 9 (not 8) infants lined up in a row, with one at the center apparently protesting his or her predicament, a single arm outstretched, mouth wide and crying.



*The Crisis* 18.6 (October 1919) 295

In this case the photo serves at least a dual purpose. On the one hand, it implies the potential long-term damage of race-violence and discrimination in America to future generations. On the other hand, it provides a kind of comic relief to the article’s serious subject-matter with its humorous depiction of a protest on a far more trivial scale.

Another, more striking, instance occurs in the October 1916 issue where the image of a child standing on a stool accompanies an NAACP article on the recent Florida

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<sup>15</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois writes, in “Our Baby Pictures,” *The Crisis* 8.6 (October 1914), that “At first we tried to make our selections with some system and according to certain rules of human interest, beauty and physical type. All this, however, was quickly given up and we frankly confess that there is no reason in the world why most of the pictures which we have not used should not have been printed instead of these” (298).



lynchings of the adoptive mother, wife, and neighbor of Boisy Long, a black man accused of stealing hogs who, when served with a warrant in the middle of the night, apparently shot the two men who delivered the warrant and then escaped. Katharine Capshaw Smith has written of the use of the child image in this politically charged context that it “requires the reader, both adult and child, to imagine the boy at risk himself for future lynching, particularly because of his sad expression and the fact that, standing on the stool, he is already set suggestively above the ground” (9). The image also no doubt seeks to connect the child’s innocence with the innocent victims of a racist society’s unchecked and self-sanctified violent oppression of its black citizens.

## National Association for the Advancement of Colored People



The town is a desolate place of shanties and small houses, and has the reputation of lawlessness. There is not one good building in the place and many of the houses are vacant. The sun beats down on the roofs and there is almost no shade. The white men live chiefly by small stores. The colored people hire out to farmers, etc. Many of the colored women go out to service in other cities.

The driving road between Gainesville and Newberry is more of the Gainesville character. Most of the land is under cultivation. Four or five large farms lie along the road, but most of them are small farms. Roads branch off from the main road leading to other farms. The chief products are cotton, corn, some sugar cane, peanuts, pecans, melons, cucumbers, and other garden truck. A large number of the farmers are Negroes. They own their own land, to a large extent, and are prosperous.

Jonesville is a blacksmith shop and a store with adjacent farms five miles from Newberry and thirteen miles from Gainesville. The rioting was along the road between Jonesville and Newberry. The white men were all either from Newberry or the neighborhood.

The trouble arose over hogs. In the last

**THE LYNCHING FUND**

**A**S we go to press the Ten Thousand Dollar Anti-lynching Fund has reached the sum of \$10,177.50 in cash and pledges. We Congratulate America.

*The Crisis* 12.6 (October 1916) 275

But the use of the image in this case, and throughout *The Crisis* Children’s Numbers, does more than underscore the attendant text; it stands in ironic juxtaposition to

it. Here the child, standing literally on a pedestal, reified on high, serves as a pure white contrast to the violent reality of lynching for many regions in America, serves on his or her pedestal as a contrast to the adults whose footing has been violently removed, and assumes a counter-stance, as an emblem of humanity, empathy and compassion, to the article's detailed account of society's widespread and astonishing inhumanity to its fellow man. From the image to the article, *The Crisis* presents a set of extreme positions, put in the simplest of terms as innocence and violence, and suggests with its praise and call for the further funding of the anti-lynching campaign that the resolution to the crisis lies between them. Galvanizing as the idyllic image of innocence may be, in reality the article attests to its impotence in the face of indiscriminate hatred and violence.

Innocence did not save the mother, wife, and neighbor, not to mention their surviving children and families, from suffering and from death. Violent retaliation similarly fails to preserve the freedom of Boisy Long, later captured and imprisoned, or the friends and family he left behind. In contrast to the tone of either its opening image or of the events it describes, the article's method is one of painstaking, thoughtful detail. Its attention to recreating the context of the crime — before, during, and after — suggests that objective reporting, political involvement, and financial contributions are all more viable and successful measures than the relatively mindless positions of innocence and violence at either end of the spectrum.

The picture/text relationship in the Children's Numbers often serves the politically-charged democratic purposes of the magazine. Sometimes this is a rather straightforward affair as with the 1914 issue, which labels a significant portion of the children's photos with their state of residence, thereby positioning the children as

representatives of a diverse people and readership. Indeed, readers of this issue could identify with one of at least 21 states, plus D.C. and Cuba. More typically, however, the democratic ideals of the Children's Numbers are suggested through the representation of contrary positions, set side-by-side in the partnership of an ironically divided image and text. Later issues, for instance, invite readers, child and adult alike, to linger on the photos, to apply even a more thoughtful interpretive lens to them, through the use of literary and biblical captions, which as often as not, speak to the death of childhood or to the injustices suffered by black children and indeed, synecdochically, by the entire race. One 1917 caption quotes the Lord's warning in Exodus that his mercy is not all-inclusive; for the unrepentant, he proclaims "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation" (288). This and other 1918 captions, which ask "Does it show any superiority of mind or soul to believe or pretend to believe in the 'inferiority' of these little ones?" (286) or "Can real Democracy deny to these children when they are grown the right to vote and take part in the government of their country?" (290), are not only directed toward arousing the indignation of black readers but are also, and more directly, addressed to a white audience, one which, practically speaking, was less likely to receive them in a similarly direct fashion.

Several 1916 poetic captions contrast the smiling faces, white bows, and white dresses with reminders of suffering and death.



*The Crisis* 12.6 (October 1916) 287

One comes from a Francis Turner Palgrave poem, “A Danish Barrow: On the East Devon Coast,” that mocks the sentimental treatment of death and ends instead with a *carpe diem* affirmation of life: “Let the children play and sit like flowers upon thy grave and crown with flowers,—that hardly have a briefer blooming-tide than they” (287). Other lyrical captions in this same issue come from William Sharp’s (Fiona McLeod, pseud.) “Little Children of the Wind”: “I hear the little children of the wind crying solitary in lonely places” — and from William Wordsworth’s “We Are Seven”: “A simple child that lightly draws its breath, and feels its life in every limb, what should it know of death!” Separately and together, these passages encourage an ironic reading of the photographs on display, inviting *Crisis* readers to see, beyond that which is presently visible, that which is present but invisible to sight, that which is, as in Palgrave’s poem, buried underneath, or, as in Sharp’s case, that which is isolate and alone and evidenced not by sight but only by sound, or, finally, as with Wordsworth’s child subject, whose math

refuses to distinguish between the living five and the two lost siblings, that which is realized through undying memory.

Du Bois's editorial commentaries on the photos of the Children's Number emphasize, as one of their many ironic attributes, their role as representative reminders of the masses of unseen, though equally worthy, beautiful, and able, black bodies and souls. There is always an implicit effort at pluralistic representation in the choice and layout of the photos in the Children's Number. Though nearly all appear to represent the most privileged of the race at that time, Du Bois insisted on their democratic qualities. In fact, very few are of a casual, everyday nature; nearly all consist of children posed and in their Sunday best. On one hand, the selection of such photos might speak to Du Bois's interests in depicting a "talented tenth." Early in the century, Du Bois had used photography in much this way when he procured 363 photographs for the American Negro Exhibit at the Paris Exposition of 1900. The majority of these photographs favored images of educated, prosperous, and light-skinned African Americans as representatives of the race.<sup>16</sup> In an era when casual photography was becoming increasingly popular, the children pictured in Du Bois's exhibit were distinguished, as Shawn Michelle Smith argues, from the cultural imagery of white "barefoot boyhood" by their "impeccable grooming, crisp, clean, stylish clothes, and composed faces" (72). But on the other hand, this earlier example of Du Bois's work with child photography may help to bring the changing aesthetics and politics of the Children's Numbers more sharply into focus. Though it appears that Du Bois may have once requisitioned photographs of perfectly angelic, perfectly poised children, here he solicits not just a more democratic imagery but

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<sup>16</sup> David Levering Lewis (30-33) and Shawn Michelle Smith (100) each read Du Bois's exhibit in these terms.

a more democratic imaginary as well. In 1916, Du Bois persists in the claim that those “who look at you from these pages are but a little and imperfect selection of those who might” (268) and makes a special request in 1923 for photo submissions “of interesting children, not necessarily pretty and dressed-up, but human and real” (103). In a 1917 editorial on “Consecration,” he writes, “Look upon these little faces that broider our pages. Think of the millions that are not here—just as lovely and alluring—and remember that it is our present business to write in on the souls that look through these dark eyes wishes, wills, determinations, consecration” (284). Though the pictures spring “mostly from the well-to-do of a large group,” as Du Bois himself confesses in 1914, he nonetheless hopes that the partnership of image and text — the combination of the “look” of “these dark eyes” and “our present business to write in on the souls” behind them will expand the testimonial boundaries and affective outreach of either genre by itself.

Indeed, as with the musical bars in *Souls*, the image of the black child, as so many of the captions reveal, is far more than a literal representation of a “physical type” but is also a sign of the ineffable, a visual testament that surpasses the capabilities of logical, textual argument, providing a kind of tangible proof of the black man’s universal humanity and intrinsic equality. The caption which asks the reader “Does it show any superiority of mind or soul to believe or pretend to believe in the ‘inferiority’ of these little ones?” implies that one look at the 9 infant photos above or of the 9 on the adjacent page will instantaneously attest to the fact of racial equality at every level: physical, intellectual, and spiritual. Of the musical notations in *Souls*, Steve Andrews has written that their disruption of Western textual protocols does not simply invert “the terms of binary opposition by overturning the hierarchical inflections—ear *over* eye, black *over*

white,” but rather “leaves the reader to ponder instead the problem of synaesthesia, of how to ‘feel together’” to “better facilitate a response on the part of readers toward recognizing simultaneous, omni-sensual cultural interactivity by blacks and whites.”<sup>17</sup> In the same way that the Sorrow Songs of black culture, already an intermixture of African memories and American experiences, are placed in *Souls* alongside Western cultural forms in the manner of a sustained dialectic, or such that each “balance[s]” each,<sup>18</sup> the pictures and text of the Children’s Numbers speak side-by-side in the counter-languages of feeling and of fact, of youth and of age. In the same way that *Souls* generically suspends the dialectic of race such that neither black nor white is subsumed by the other, even such that a new and exceptional hybridized subjectivity, the African American, can be articulated and felt, the Children’s Numbers similarly suspend the cultures of childhood and of maturity such that their own “synaesthesia” within the black community can commence. The generic hybridity and insistent cross-writing of these *Crisis* issues goes beyond troubling the line between child and adult text to suggesting, as Smith argues, that all of the material in *The Crisis* Children’s Numbers — every image, every caption, every article — are equally “applicab[le] . . . to every reader, regardless of age” (4).

And too like the epigraph, bar, and essay in *Souls*, the picture and text in the Children’s Numbers lend themselves to a hermeneutics which is not simply hybrid but multiply and ambiguously so. As part socio-political organ, part literary periodical, and part picture book, there is no one way to interpret the place of the photos in *The Crisis*

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<sup>17</sup> Steve Andrews, “Toward a Synaesthetics of Soul: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Teleology of Race,” *Re-Cognizing W.E.B. Du Bois in the Twenty-First Century*, eds Mary Keller and Chester J. Fontenot, Jr. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007) 149-150.

<sup>18</sup> Eric J. Sundquist, “Swing Low: *The Souls of Black Folk*,” *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1993) 485.

Children's Number. The issues, with their 80-100 photos of black children can be read from vantages most general and abstract to depths most personal, most specific. For some, particularly for picture contributors, they may imbue the issue with the intimate status of family album or scrapbook. For others, the photos might be propagandist tools in the militant political agenda of the magazine. For some the photos might provide visual validation of black beauty, health, and future prosperity. And still for others they may even be seen as windows to what they are visibly not — as representatives of the unseen, of the soul, and of the unrepresented.

For the children themselves, the photos interspersed throughout the more traditional compartments of the magazine from "Opinion" to "The Horizon" to "Along the Color Line" may be seen as a way to draw the eyes of child readers to a political message they might otherwise skip or gloss over or to prepare them for realities beyond their own present personal experience or to echo and lend communal support to those experiences potentially already encountered. And they may also be seen as a means for mitigating for those young eyes the effects of the perhaps too serious or too violent content of the standard *Crisis* fare. While there is little record of the effect of *The Crisis* Children's Numbers on actual child readers, Horace Mann Bond does offer one retrospective glimpse of his own experiences as an "avid" child reader of *The Crisis* and of its singular and consequently profound impact on shaping his "inner world." In a *Freedomways* tribute to the legacy of Du Bois, he writes:

I remember the pleasant faces of brown and black children pictured in the magazine . . . and I remember, also, the horrifying cartoons depicting 'lynch law,' . . . Indeed, I remember a period during which the same frightening nightmare would recur, night after night; I was being pursued by the grisly form of 'lynch law' . . . .



The cartoons were strong stuff for a child, perhaps, as were the factual accounts of the lynchings . . . Yet I am glad that through Du Bois I had these vicarious experiences with the real and brutal world of race and color, as with the real world of black men and women clothed in beauty and dignity. (16)

Evident in Mann's memories of reading *The Crisis* is the feeling of twoness. His primary recollection is not only dualistically structured, between the "pleasant" photos of black children and the nightmare-inducing accounts of lynching, but it is itself doubled in his consequent appreciation for what these divergent readings fostered, the "vicarious" experience of two opposite and equal realities: the one of a "brutal world of race and color," the other "the real world of black men and women clothed in beauty and dignity."

All of these, and many more, are possible independent readings of the imagistic interspersal of the Children's Numbers, but by its very variety and more so by the frequent method of contrasting variety, the magazine, in fact, invites each reader to engage with multiple perspectives, similarly intertwined and similarly diverse.<sup>19</sup> Though the Children's Number draws upon a children's picture book tradition, the relationship between picture and text utilized within it, in part because of the dual audience of the magazine and in part because of Du Bois's own ideological stance, is, as with the experimental variety of *Souls*, more modernist than conventional. For the traditional picture book, the collection of images is akin to the twice-told tale, where the picture's chief function is illustrative, promoting and echoing in visual form the message of the

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<sup>19</sup> In what is an important turn from the method of *Souls*, Du Bois does not leave the interpretative variety of the Children's Numbers unremarked. In October 1914, he writes, "The pictures which we have published may be considered from many points of view." And he proceeds with his own explication of some of these. For the students "of a great social problem," he writes that they will first be seen "as physical types" (298). By another "prejudiced jury," they will, "notwithstanding" all of their many attributes, be "looked upon as 'problems'" (299). And last, but certainly not least, Du Bois describes the child images as "argument[s] against war" and "against the greatest modern cause of war,—race prejudice" (300).

text.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, picture book scholars agree that the move toward more complex and even ironic relationships between picture and text did not begin in any widespread sense until the middle of the twentieth century, when there was a shift toward the psychology of childhood and toward figurative, rather than literal, meanings in children's literature.<sup>21</sup> And while the Children's Number does allow for some such synchronic readings between image and text, more often than not it simultaneously or even preferably positions picture and text in ironic juxtaposition such that, rather than their proximity, it is the gap between the image and the caption or article which is the most striking feature of their partnership. In other words, the selective content and layout of the Children's Numbers asks the child to not only understand the hopes, aspirations, and beauty that others see in him but to also see their very different — concerned, discouraged, outraged — perspective of the world at large and to discern, perhaps also, the distance between those two perceptions. And for adult readers this same disjunct, between image and text, visually affirms that it is possible to fill the traditional mold of childhood with the bodies of their own black children and yet signals with caution that this substitution may yet nonetheless be undesirable, given the very different set of experiences that await their children just the same.

The selection of child images which are removed from reality, replete with pedestals, backdrops, pristine children, and all photography's finest, set alongside poetic lamentations of motherhood, reports of segregation, lynching, and even child rape (to

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<sup>20</sup> Denise E. Agosto refers to the traditional picture book in the terms of the "twice-told tale" and distinguishes from this form of "parallel storytelling" the more modern "interdependent tale," where the images bear much more of a burden in the meaning-making process (267).

<sup>21</sup> Maurice Sendak's 1963 *Where the Wild Things Are* is often cited as a highly influential forerunner to this new trend in modern American picture books. On the mid-century shift to the "internal child" see Barbara Bader's "American Picture Books: From Max's Metaphorical Monsters to Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse," 142, and for the shift in value to the figurative and intangible see William Moebius's "Introduction to Picturebook Codes," 137.

name a few of the subjects “broidered” with the child image in the Children’s Numbers) creates a pendulous effect, one that swings widely from the loftiest of romantic heights to the most mournful of reality’s lows. Du Bois often warned about the dangers of the extremes of child-rearing, from harboring the child in the enclave of racial and realist ignorance to exposing him or her with abandon to a climate of hostility, hatred, and despair, but in advocating a middle course, he also, in the same breath as it were, presented the very thing which he criticized. To travel the road between, for Du Bois, meant rejecting and ignoring neither side, meant actually holding them each, at once, together. The presentation of the romanticized and the deplorable, side-by-side, is, in the context of the periodical, a striking print rendition of the manifest simultaneity of double-consciousness. The dream of double-consciousness meant embodying the specificities of one’s history and experience as a black person in America with dignity and pride and at the same time claiming patriotic membership to a nationalist spirit of equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. Du Bois’s dialogue of youth and age seeks similarly to negotiate, in equal measure, a vital heritage of cultural/personal experience alongside a merged early American and Transcendentalist idyllic vision.

And, in turn, such an articulation implicitly seeks out to engage and/or to construct a similarly dialogic reader, one capable of perceiving, reading, and synthesizing the divided child and adult components but also the distance between many of the oppressed’s lived experiences and the social democratic ideals shared across the racial divide. Beyond the more visually striking shifts in media, Du Bois’s textual contributions to the Children’s Numbers, and more so later in *The Brownies’ Book*, engage in a similar phenomenon across the lines of generic, tropic, and typographic difference. Du Bois’s

1914 editorial, for instance, makes continued use of the child photographic heading but contains sufficient ironic division within the story itself and indeed is as much a series of visions in the manner of its telling as are they. I have here used the term story because this editorial, adapted for the child reader, draws upon fiction as well as fact. The subject-matter for the article is war, the title “Of the Children of Peace,” but like an optometrist’s prescriptive phoropter — Du Bois manipulates the narrative lens to reveal the limitations of veiled awareness. First, he begins in the coterminous manners of legend and fairy tale, beckoning “all my father’s children” to come and sit at father Du Bois’s knee to hear the “Once upon a time” of war, glittering and great. He describes an army of “Tall, handsome men, all gold and silver and broadcloth” with “little innocent guns” and horses “that curvetted and tossed their shining bits” with “great, sweet eyes and quivering shining softness.” But at the point that Du Bois reaches the “great cry of pride and joy and battle from the people,” the fairy tale transforms abruptly into a dream sequence. “With that cry,” Du Bois writes, “I seemed suddenly to awake. I somehow saw *through* . . .” In a language reminiscent of *Souls*, the romantic vision of war is revealed as a veil of fiction. Du Bois invites the sympathetic cognition of the child reader “(You know sometimes how you seem to see, but are blind until something happens and you really see?)” and in so doing emphasizes, once more, the end of a romanticized childhood for *Crisis* readers. In describing the glittering veil of war as fairy tale, as dream, Du Bois also describes the veiled idyllic sight of the ideal child. Indeed, he uses the former to entice the latter, to gather the imagined child audience around him, and to attract actual child readers in turn. As Du Bois descended behind the veil in his journey from North to South in *Souls*, so here too he enters, on a much smaller, briefer scale, the veiled world of childhood. The

impetus in both cases is to raise awareness, to rend the veil, to reveal blindness and confer greater sight. In this case, the narrative itself, as with *The Crisis* Children's Numbers at large, seeks to be for the child reader nothing less than the "something" that "happens" to make "you really see."

The remainder, which is the majority of Du Bois's editorial, acts as a mock twice-told tale in which every object from the first fairy tale vision is rewritten and reseen. The story is told a second time, but now every object seems its opposite through the new lens of unsheltered sight. The previously "Tall, handsome" army become men "who trudged and limped, naked and dirty, with sodden, angry, distorted faces." Their previously "little innocent guns" become "little innocent children" carried to their deaths. The horses are all killed save one who lives "a gaunt, sweating" thing "with bloody nostrils, great pain-struck eyes, and bowels trailing on the earth." In one sense, this is a striking predecessor to the NAACP article on lynching introduced with the image of the child, posed in white on a stool. In both, Du Bois uses the divided child-adult audience to frame a story between the two extremes of innocence and violence. In both accounts, neither innocence nor violence serves as a means to a profitable or even bearable conclusion. The innocent, once again, die. Violence, once again, breeds only more, and vaster violence. But in another sense, Du Bois's editorial is a forerunner to his later work for children in that it is far more global in its reach than is the later piece and is also far more explicit about the new kind of globally and doubly aware child reader it seeks to foster.

Du Bois's editorial on war addresses not one war but all wars, for, as Du Bois writes, "The cause of War is Preparation for War." There is no logical cause that is not expressly circular. The "Hatred and Despising of Men" leads to "Death, Hate, Hunger,

and Pain!” But, of course, the essay is written at the start of WWI, and though war in general is its subject, its urgency comes from the present global crisis. Breaking the cycle here, as always for Du Bois, means graduating from single to double vision. As in *Souls*, Du Bois insists on the twoness of the present dilemma and in the binding twoness of its resolution. For him, the “Children of Peace” cannot bring their namesake without first knowing the many truths and lies of war. The conflict must come to reside within before it can ever come to rest without. In the bait and switch method of fairy tale turned horror story, Du Bois reveals his investment in and simultaneously seeks to compel a new kind of childhood, one which is doubly aware, aware of innocence and violence, aware of the fairy tale and the reality, the dream and the nightmare. Rampersad notes of Du Bois’s method in *Souls* that, more than a subject of exploratory import, “the notion of duality is central to Du Bois’ perception,” and it is, in conjuncture with enumeration, among the crucial elements of his stylistic approach (73). Such is also dramatically the case in Du Bois’s writings for children, where in addition to the lines of race, gender, and of nation there has been added the line of age. And here as there, Du Bois encourages the simultaneous and reciprocal expression of all, which is to say both, sides of each of these preconceived dualities. Americans in order to see and understand the problems of America must cross her borders. The child in order to prepare for the problems and the resolutions to Age must enter early the territory, typically of adults.

**The New Child is the New Adult: Du Bois and “As the Crow Flies”:**

So strong was Du Bois’s belief in this new hybridized model of childhood, as much a man as a child, as much a child of the world as of the nation, that 1914, the same year that he wrote the editorial in question, saw his own child, Yolande, along with his

wife, in Britain with the purpose of acquiring not only a formal educational experience still largely unavailable in America, but also of gaining a worldly education in the causes and experiences of war. Nina Du Bois's letters from Brighton to her husband at home in New York attest to the climate of warfare: from the many wounded soldiers she meets, to her visit to a recently opened trench, one of many that "are all around London,"<sup>22</sup> to the need for "zeppelin drills" at Yolande's school because of recent bombing raids on London.<sup>23</sup> Du Bois's November 10<sup>th</sup> letter to his daughter includes conciliatory responses to her queries about riding lessons and a new watch with postponed promises to take up later the matter of both expenses, but his emphasis steers quickly to the matter of Yolande's education. He writes: "But most and foremost — lessons, lessons, lessons! Learn, learn, learn! Master your books, think and read. Read hard, dry books as well as stories. Read English history and French history and German history and see the reasons of this war."<sup>24</sup> Du Bois closes by sending her an issue of *The Crisis* and encourages her to share it with the other girls at her school. It is not clear which issue he encloses for her, but given the November date of the letter it may very well have been the October 1914 Children's Number. Here Du Bois shows his investment in providing a wide-ranging education for his daughter, one which spans nations and genres (he pushes "dry books as well as stories"). Last, but not least, he seeks to remind her of her own heritage at the same time that he has actively removed her from it. Though she is living an ocean away,

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<sup>22</sup> Nina Du Bois, letter to W.E.B. Du Bois, 8-15 August 1914, General Correspondence Part 1, Reel 4:680, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 31 October — 15 November 1914.

<sup>24</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, letter to Yolande Du Bois, 10 November 1914, General Correspondence Part 1, Reel 4:681, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

he uses *The Crisis* to remind her “about our people — your people and mine, whom we must love and of whom we must be proud.”

Du Bois’s concerns over the reading and periodical reading practices of his own daughter may have been a contributing factor as well in his 1919 decision to expand the appeal of the annual Children’s Number into a monthly magazine designed directly for young black readers. It may also, however, have been the result of concern over the conflicted content of the Children’s Numbers, expressed by parents and by fellow members of *The Crisis* staff. The year 1919, in fact, saw not only the first advertisements for *The Brownies’ Book* but also the addition to *The Crisis* staff, as literary editor and as the future editor of its new periodical offspring, Jessie Redmon Fauset. Though much work has been done to recuperate the unconventional in Fauset’s work as editor and author, her unconventionality often arose from her unpopular application of conventional narratives and ordinary qualities to her black characters — this in a time when many white readers and publishers craved depictions of a “black ‘underworld’” and when many black artists were striving in yet another direction, toward the more radical and experimental.<sup>25</sup> In sum, there were a number of voices and perspectives, quite different from Du Bois’s own, which contributed, though in uncertain degrees, to the formation of *The Brownies’ Book*.

Certainly, there are significant portions of the 1919 announcement of *The Brownies’ Book* in that year’s Children’s Number that sound little like the Du Bois of previous issues. The primary cause, as Du Bois records, for the new, distinctly child venture is “the consternation of the Editors of *The Crisis*” that they “have had to record

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<sup>25</sup> Deborah McDowell describes these dual disadvantages during Fauset’s publishing career, from white and black communities alike, in her introduction to Fauset’s novel, *Plum Bun*. “Introduction: Regulating Midwives,” *Plum Bun*, 1929 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990) ix-xxxiii.



some horror in nearly every Children's Number" (285). While accurate, there were also certainly horrors which were not factually necessary under the magazine's role as newspaper informant and which Du Bois chose to record in the Children's Number as part of its principally dual design, as with, for example, "Of the Children of Peace," Du Bois's own fictionalized editorial on war. Then, too, there is little room in the seven listed aims of the *Brownies'* project for what would be Du Bois's own contribution to it: "As the Crow Flies." These aims were to make black children "realize that being 'colored' is a normal, beautiful thing," to teach them "the history and achievements of the Negro race," to make them aware "that other colored children have grown into beautiful, useful and famous persons," "to teach them delicately a code of honor and action in their relations with white children," "to turn their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition and love of their homes and companions," "to point out the best amusements and joys and worth-while things in life," and "to inspire them to prepare for definite occupations and duties with a broad spirit of sacrifice" (286-287). In addition and in contrast to this new semi-pragmatic, mostly optimistic program, the Crow is a clear extension of Du Bois's earlier effort, expressed in "Of the Children of Peace," to produce a "cry" (in this case a "caw") capable of lifting the veil of childhood, to partner the dream of childhood with mature reality, and to make them "really see," with a capital "T," the "Truth," "particularly," as Du Bois would write in the later *Crisis* version of "As the Crow Flies," "the unpleasant truth."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, "As the Crow Flies," *The Crisis* 36.6 (June 1929) 187. While it is significant that Du Bois continues for adults what began as a children's editorial series, it is worth noting that the later adult versions of "As the Crow Flies" lack the dualistic qualities of the earlier *Brownies' Book* numbers, exhibiting to a far greater extent the Crow's as not only a truthful but a peculiarly sardonic voice.

Other authors, however, who made the transition from the Children's Numbers to *The Brownies' Book*, took the revised project to heart. Particularly striking is the contrast in Georgia Douglas Johnson's work in these two different periodical contexts. Take, for instance, Johnson's Children's Number contribution (after the dissolution of *The Brownies' Book*) in October 1922, titled "Motherhood," whose closing stanza reads:

Don't knock at my heart, little one,  
 I cannot bear the pain  
 Of turning deaf ears to your call,  
 Time and time again.  
 You do not know the monster men  
 Inhabiting the earth.  
 Be still, be still, my precious child,  
 I cannot give you birth.

And compare it to the opening of her *Brownies' Book* poem, titled "Brown Eyes," published two years prior:

Little maid with troubled hair,  
 Nothing blows than you, more fair,  
 Sweeter far than breath of morn  
 In its cradle, newly born.  
 All the world was made for you,  
 Beauties rare and mother, too . . .

While each of these poems is openly addressed to a child or child audience, in the first, tonal preference is given to the mother-speaker rather than to the child recipient. Where the world of the first poem is not for children, full of "monster men" and mothers who despair at their inability to mother, the world and mother of the second poem are "made for" the child. Each poem speaks to the rigid definition of motherhood as one's absolute devotion to her children, but the burdened and embattled mother of the first poem, unable to embody this role, attempts to abort her child whereas everything, from the world, to

the mother, to the poem itself, seamlessly conforms to the child center in the latter *Brownies' Book* verse.

Most fundamentally and most divergently from the cross-written Children's Numbers of *The Crisis*, the goal of *The Brownies' Book* was to occupy much more fully, much more consistently the space of children's literature. Though short-lived, *The Brownies' Book* marked an important milestone, becoming the first substantial periodical for children created by and created for African Americans. As such it offered black children a singular and substantial alternative to the plethora of periodicals circulating for white audiences. The title itself would have had unmistakable resonances for child readers of the time with Palmer Cox's widely popular *Brownies'* series — the first of which was even similarly titled *The Brownies: Their Book* (1887). But unlike Cox's mystical Brownies, who invisibly and under the cover of night playfully imitate man's daytime activities and also correct his daily mistakes by performing neglected good deeds, Du Bois's periodical is addressed to the "True Brownies," just as playful, just as good, but visible and real.<sup>27</sup> Dianne Johnson-Feelings and Elinor Sinnette, who have described the history of *The Brownies' Book* in more detail, have also described it as an important alternative for black children to what was far and away the most successful children's periodical of the time, *St. Nicholas Magazine*, edited by Mary Mapes Dodge (where, perhaps incidentally, Cox's "Brownies" made their first appearance in print).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, "The True Brownies," *The Crisis* 18.6 (October 1919) 285. For a more thorough explication both of the history of the Brownie figure in children's literature and of how that figure is revised in *TBB* see Fern Kory's "Once upon a Time in Aframerica: The 'Peculiar' Significance of Fairies in the *Brownies' Book*."

<sup>28</sup> According to Johnson-Feelings, "Afterword," *The Best of The Brownies' Book*, ed. Dianne Johnson-Feelings (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 335-346, it was "the estimation of W.E.B. Du Bois" that "young black readers needed information that was interpreted and reported from a radically different perspective than that offered in *St. Nicholas*," which was not immune from the "preponderance of negative black images in the American mass media" (336). And Elinor Desverney Sinnette, in her "*The Brownies'*

The September 1919 advertisement for *The Brownies' Book* promises all that *St. Nicholas* and its competitors have to offer, including “pictures, puzzles, stories, letters from little ones, clubs, games and oh—everything!” The goal in every case was to imitate and to revise. *The Brownies' Book* sought to occupy the space of the traditional children's periodical, but it had to adapt everything that such texts had to offer for the experiences, needs, and desires of black children, and it also had to confront and reject a number of black stereotypes not altogether uncommon in such white children's fare.

Certainly, Du Bois was aware of *St. Nicholas* and its draw for young readers. Yolande Du Bois was herself an avid subscriber to the periodical, as her 1916 letters home from England attest. There she politely persists in reminding her father that the time to renew her subscription has in fact already come and gone.<sup>29</sup> But the most striking evidence for positing *The Brownies' Book* as a conscious alternative to *St. Nicholas* comes in the form of Du Bois's own running contribution to it in “As the Crow Flies.” *St. Nicholas* was probably original in its use of a hybrid editorial persona, in the form of the part plant, part preacher Jack-in-the-Pulpit, to address the child reader and to deliver custom-fit news and information to him or her as it has been delivered to him, through his “chicks.”<sup>30</sup> In “As the Crow Flies,” Du Bois likewise makes use, for the first time, of a hybrid persona as well as the more general concept of world events as seen through the eyes and means of feathered-flight. As *St. Nicholas* wrote of the knowledgeable but

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*Book: A Pioneer Publication for Children*,” *Freedomways: A Quarterly Review of the Negro Freedom Movement* 5.1 (Winter 1965), argues that *St. Nicholas* was, by turns, guilty of presenting child readers with gross caricatures of the black race or (as was more often the case) altogether remise in the representation of black childhood. And too Sinnette argues that *The Brownies' Book*'s manner of presenting the news (a clear reference to “As the Crow Flies”) was “more mature” than was *St. Nicholas*'s journalistic counterpart, “The WatchTower” (134-135).

<sup>29</sup> Yolande Du Bois, letters to W.E.B. Du Bois, 12 January 1916 and February 1916, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

<sup>30</sup> Suzanne Rahn writes that Dodge's “non-human editorial persona” is, as far as she knows, “the first of his kind” (110).

implanted Jack, that the magazine itself will be the celebrated means for his communication to children the world over, having “laid the paragraphic wires” for him,<sup>31</sup> so too does Du Bois characterize the Crow in the first issue as a figure full of knowledge, who “*must see and hear*” “*a lot of things*,” but who, given his linguistic failings, needs *The Brownies’ Book* to “*ma[k]e him talk for you*.”<sup>32</sup>

But unlike *St. Nicholas*, and indeed unlike much of *The Brownies’ Book*, there is a prominent difference between Dodge’s Jack, the naturally-interested bearer of odd and amusing facts, and the two-toned voice of hope and despair in Du Bois’s Crow persona. Indeed, Du Bois new venture not only extends the juxtapositions of the Children’s Numbers but it systematically solidifies, upholds, and encourages double consciousness as a method and model for black youth. This implicit aim is made manifest most strikingly in the figure of the Crow, a figure of transcendent blackness whose flights steer pendulously between hope and despair and who, as such, recollects Du Bois’s own boyhood response to double consciousness: to live “above [the veil] in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows” (*Souls* 4). But where Du Bois served up his own transcendent experience of double consciousness as an accident of fortune, here he reimagines it, through the double-voice and double-methods of the irritatingly ordinary Crow, as a model of resilient self-awareness for the new black child reader. For the two years that *The Brownies’ Book* circulated, “As the Crow Flies,” all 24 entries, followed a remarkably consistent formula, with an embellished literary opening of hopeful tone and intimate address, set apart from the main journalistic body with its primary focus on worldwide political problems and socio-economic distress. In the first issue, the

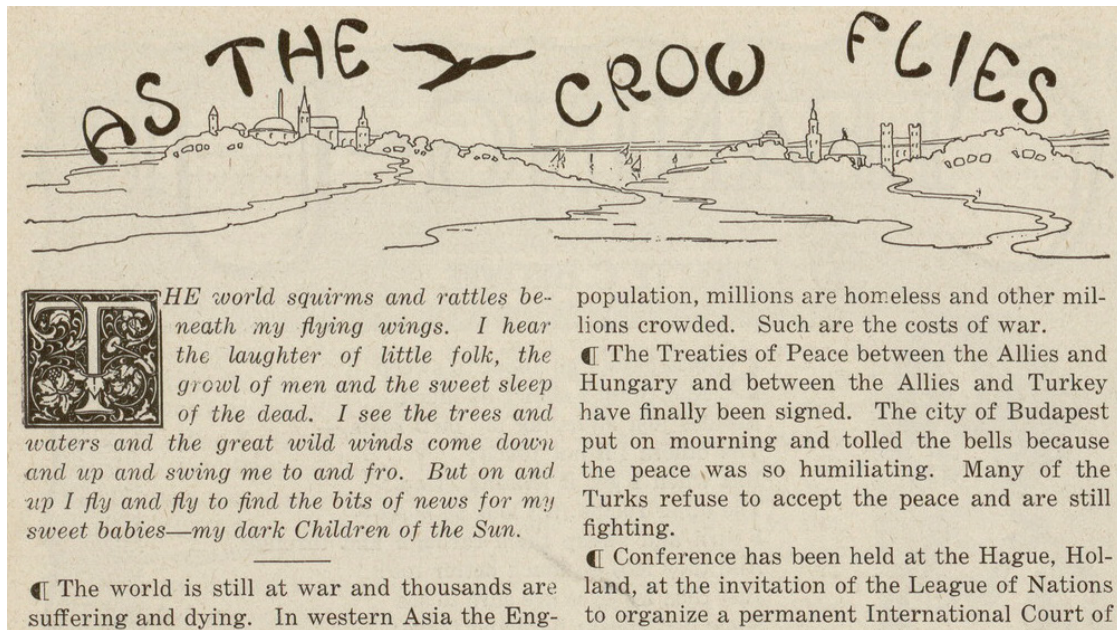
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<sup>31</sup> Mary Mapes Dodge, “Jack-in-the-Pulpit,” *St. Nicholas: An Illustrated Magazine for Boys and Girls* 1 (November 1873) 46.

<sup>32</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “As the Crow Flies,” *The Brownies’ Book* 1.1 (January 1920) 23.

introduction is distinguished first by the ornate, floral styling of its premier letter, a line break, and a pair of centered swastikas; the news portion is demarcated in turn by its bullet-marked, no-nonsense delivery of the news. By the second issue, the opening is even further set apart typographically. In addition to the elaborate lettering, the section is offset in italics. A short line now divides the opening from the news, which remains matter-of-factly bulleted. In some ways, this is clearly an extension of the ironic aspects of the picture/text relationship in the earlier Children's Numbers of *The Crisis*, but the consistency of the media in this case renders the contrasting styles and methods far more apparent. Du Bois has removed many of the variables that made the Children's Numbers so open to diverse interpretation. At the heart of these changes are precisely the formulaic aspects of this new set piece. Where the ironic partnerships of picture and text in the Children's Numbers shared the stage with the synchronous and with the haphazard, Du Bois, as the sole creator and producer of "As the Crow Flies," constructs it as a far more systematically double method and model.

Beginning with the latter, the subjectivity of the Crow is insistently proposed as an alternative model to the errors and even the atrocities of humanity. As much as Du Bois called for photo-submissions of less than perfect children which could better represent the masses of common black Americans, he himself acknowledged failure in this (acknowledged it even in the need for the request). The figure of the figurative Crow is in many respects Du Bois's unlikely solution. In the place of the picture perfect baby, Du Bois invites child readers of "As the Crow Flies" to imagine themselves as "crowlets" or "crowlings" and to imagine the Crow himself as their periodical parent. The September 1920 entry begins:



*The Brownies' Book* 1.9 (September 1920) 272

The Crow is a surprisingly sensitive figure. Though he flies above the child-world that “*squirms and rattles*,” he senses its discomfort as if by touch; he hears its individual sounds; his eyesight, for which he is most celebrated, is keen enough to see even “*the great wild winds*.” And, too, though he flies above the world’s sufferings, his journeys are not without obstacles, swung as he is “*to and fro*,” and they are not without purpose. Where Du Bois was able to send his own daughter to Europe to learn first-hand the lessons of war, for the homebound readers of *The Brownies' Book* he sends the Crow in their stead. The Crow travels the world in search of a new kind of sustenance for a new kind of child. The “*bits of news*” he finds and redistributes among the “*children of the sun*” are largely summed up by the first issue’s first fact, that “The world is still at war and thousands are suffering and dying,” followed by a double-digit catalogue of battles presently underway, from Asia Minor to Syria, to Siberia, to Ireland. As with his editorial, “Of the Children of Peace,” printed six years prior in *The Crisis* Children’s

Number, Du Bois makes a now repeated and systematic effort in “As the Crow Flies” to instruct the black children of peace in the awareness of war and to lend them strength through an awareness of global suffering.

The Crow, thus, not only makes for a most unconventional parent, as devoted to exposing his “*sweet babies*” as he is to protecting them, but he repeatedly serves as a revisionary foil to the ideals of race representation. It would be difficult to imagine a persona more removed from Du Bois’s earlier “talented tenth” imaginary. Yet while the latter has continued to represent an important part of the way Du Bois is read — as prudish, as elitist, as a lifelong Victorian — the figure of the Crow, irritatingly ordinary, was Du Bois’s most enduring persona.<sup>33</sup> Conceived for *The Brownies’ Book*, “As the Crow Flies” became Du Bois’s signature editorial title for the next 30 years. With the *Pittsburgh Courier* at least, Du Bois encountered some resistance over the matter. Publisher, Robert Vann, explained that the Crow was too reminiscent of Jim Crow, the minstrel figure who gave institutional segregation its name in nineteenth-twentieth century America.<sup>34</sup> But this may have been part of the proverbial point. The problem of imperialism, including American imperialism, while an important concern for Du Bois when he wrote *Souls*, became pervasive to his politics, aesthetics, and thought with the onset of the first world war. Du Bois came to see European imperialism, especially in Africa, as the “root” cause for the first world war and also as integral to the failure of

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<sup>33</sup> The perception of Du Bois as a modern Victorian is common. Vanessa D. Dickerson may take this argument the furthest in her thesis that Du Bois affirms the benefits of a “Victorian soul” throughout his career, even into his late Pan-African politics.

<sup>34</sup> See Robert L. Vann’s January 21, 1936 letter to Du Bois (in Aptheker 124).

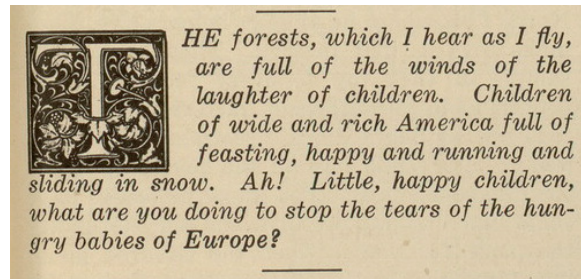
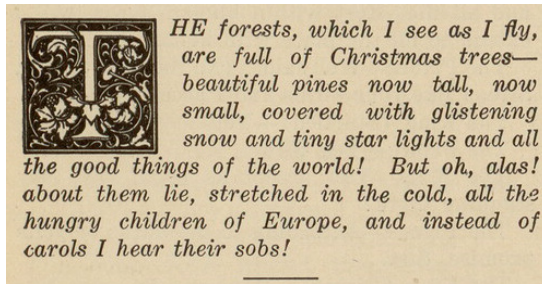


American democracy (as yet) to cross the lines of inequality separating races, nations, genders, and (we may now add) generations as well.<sup>35</sup>

That Du Bois felt powerfully that children need to “see the reasons of this war” was made clear in his letter to his daughter as well as in the 1914 Children’s Number which he likely offered as reading material both for her and for all black children. “As the Crow Flies,” despite the other aims of *The Brownies’ Book*, is a clear and persistent extension of this project. It is no coincidence that the anti-imperial Crow was conceived for the pages of *The Brownies’ Book* at the same time that Du Bois was composing *Darkwater*, viewed by many as Du Bois’s Pan-African revision of *Souls*. In fact the presence of this persona is visible in the voice and structure of *Darkwater*, which Du Bois describes as a compilation on the wing as it were, oscillating between “the sterner flights of logic” and “little alightings of what may be poetry” (ix). The Crow’s is likewise a traveling method, one characterized by a “*swing[ing] to and fro*” not just between the lyrical and the cacophonous but between home and abroad. Even by the second issue, the format of “As the Crow Flies” begins to double itself around these international and national foci. By the eighth issue, the same elaborate, italicized font that opens the Crow’s journalistic view onto the world now routinely returns, midway through his journey, to introduce a second look at America.

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<sup>35</sup> I draw here from Du Bois’s 1915 essay, “The African Roots of War,” which traces the first world war to the battle for profits that white cultures have waged along the color line. Yet Du Bois remains hopeful that “our democratic ideals” may yet be “extended” to “yellow, brown, and black peoples” (712).



*The Brownies' Book* 1.12 (Dec 1920) 378      *The Brownies' Book* 1.12 (Dec 1920) 379

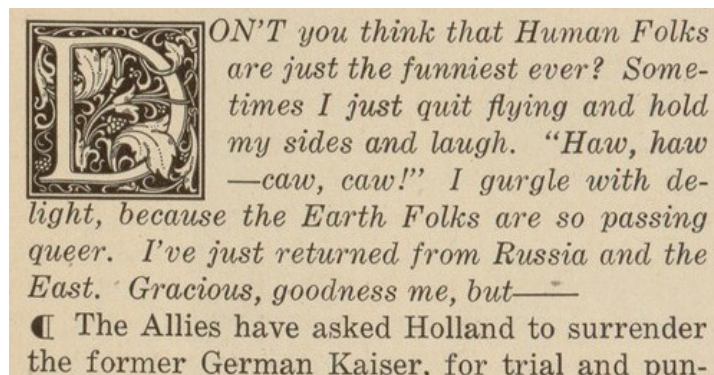
The obvious parallels between these twice-told openings in the Christmas issue serve the larger purpose of highlighting their more distinct polarities. The slippery inversion that opens the issue, leading the reader from the anticipation of a celebration to starvation, is echoed in the second which moves once more from American visions of feasting and fun to a reminder of its global, physical, and emotional counterpart on the other side of the ocean. The subtle differences between the two openings (from “see”ing in the first to “hear”ing in the second) and between the endings (exclamatory in one “I hear their sobs!” and interrogatory “what are you doing. . .?” in the other) enacts in yet another way the “synaesthesia” of double consciousness, but the direction is less toward enhancing “the cultural interactivity of blacks and whites” than it is now toward encouraging the interactivity of African Americans with subalterns of other nations and circumstance.

In fact, the Crow swings here not only between extremities of feeling, of rhetoric, and of geography but between two polarized notions of childhood: between “hungry children” and “happy children,” between certain realities and ideations of childhood. In the context of the Crow’s international perspective, neither the romanticized child of America nor the impoverished child of Europe appears acceptable or sustainable. In one of the most crucial paradoxes of “As the Crow Flies,” happiness may well be its own kind of hunger. From the outset, the Crow has positioned himself as feeding the

*Brownies'* readers with these "bits of news." Flying between these polarized experiences of childhood may be one way of remediating the differences between them. One of the truest facts of the Crow, no less than of the conventional child, is that he is always "happy," always "free." But, of course, the other truest fact about him, one not typically extended to ideas of childhood, is that he is also always devotedly attendant to turmoil and sorrow. He flies above but never out of sight of human suffering. He sees the worst that man has to offer his fellow man, but he never succumbs to despair. The Crow advises his July 1921 readers that "*Happiness is not something to seek, it is something in us. I am happy, yet as I fly and fly, I cannot find happiness*" (206) and conversely that "*Sorrow is not in us, but about us. I find sorrow everywhere, but there lies no sorrow in my light and flying heart*" (207). In this important instance, the Crow succeeds in presenting a simultaneous consciousness of happiness and sorrow and yet the doubleness of this awareness is far from debilitating. Maintaining the doubleness of double-consciousness without falling into despair is among the signature concerns of *Souls*. Though Du Bois had succeeded personally in negotiating this tightrope, he nonetheless repeatedly expressed the feeling that his life could not be held out as a model for other "black folk."

The addition of these American introductions also makes clear the Crow's interest in folding the child reader into the process of its dualistic method and concerns. These second introductions become spaces to directly address this readership, but the contrary styles and subjects of the two-toned "As the Crow Flies" have indirectly invited child readers to mimic the oscillations of the Crow all along. From one perspective, the shifts between these flying introductions and the more weighty factual catalogues that follow encourage a oscillation back and forth between different kinds of reading practices,

between the familiar and unknown, the pleasing and the difficult. From another, the shifts have invited child readers to see themselves as through a different set of eyes, not the eyes of the condescending white world — as was the problem in *Souls* — but through the eyes of the trans-national Crow. The Crow’s subjectivity signifies chiefly the rejection of so many extant role models for the black child. He refuses romanticized models of childhood for his “children of the sun” and rejects, perhaps more surprisingly, most all adult models as well. In the June 1920 issue, the Crow interrupts the onslaught of news to observe that “*Humans the world over are much worse than Crows and, goodness me! But Crows are no angels—specially in summer times when planted seeds are sweet*” (184). And in a manner most akin to signifying, the Crow asks:



*The Brownies’ Book* 1.3 (March 1920): 76

It goes without saying that the aftermath of WWI is far from the stuff of entertainment. The transitioning of the Crow’s human-sounding laugh, “*Haw, haw,*” to his own cacophonous cry, “*caw, caw,*” underscores his sarcasm and implies that the celebrations, following on the heels of the war, are not only vastly premature but several notes off-key. The twice-appearing and very versatile long dash invites the child audience to mentally fill the gaps that the dashes so conveniently provide — first between the uneven tones of human and crow and then between the Crow’s own pendulous perception.

Most importantly this passage and the Crow's earlier "human" chastisements suggest a realignment of the parent-child relationship, with the Crow not only making a case for black children as the new adults but also making the rather adamant case for the Crow as their new parent. There is in "As the Crow Flies" a note of fantasy and of science fiction. Through the Crow's eyes, black children become crowlets, and adults become by turns members of an alien species of "Earth Folks" or they become children. Just as Du Bois reverses the presumed roles of child and adult in *Darkwater* when he describes imperialist Europe as a "precocious, self-centered, forward-striving child" (97), the Crow offers a widespread critique of adults in the terms of childishness: "*O the naughty men and women who will not learn of Little Children and behave! Wherever the Crow flies he brings the glad message of little children—caw, caw, caw!*" (November 1920, 333). The Crow's reprimand in this case serves to diminish the stature of the adult. Meanwhile, the subjectivity of the child becomes nearly indistinguishable from that of the Crow. This is not only because the child's "glad message" is unconventionally, even ironically disciplinary (the Crow translates it as a lesson to "behave!") but also because the child's "glad message" elides with and may even literally be the "caw, caw, caw!" of the Crow.

Given national contrast, the child of divided consciousness in *Souls* feels inferior in relation to a more privileged white America. But given international contrast, the Crow suggests that there is enormous responsibility in being a black child in America. In "As the Crow Flies" there is ample evidence for Amy Kaplan's thesis that Du Bois effectively "turns the white man's burden into the black man's burden" by elevating the African American's American status (177-178). But rather than emphasize the metaphors of

exceptionalism inflected in the idea of American imperialism, Du Bois's ideology of the black man's burden emphasizes the weight of a double burden. The emblematic black man shoulders the burden of race oppression because he is imagined to be so burdened. The quality of this difference is magnified as it is funneled through Du Bois's sometimes lyrical, often cacophonous works for children. Elsewhere, most notably in Du Bois's international romance, *Dark Princess*, the figure of the child has been read as an "exceptional heir" who "signifies the heroic synthesis of double-consciousness among African Americans and the liberation of all peoples of color" (Tate xxi). But Du Bois's works for children posit the child not as exceptional but, perhaps more radically, as equal. Beyond the white or black man's burden, the Crow conveys not only that black childhood comes with its own burdens but that black children themselves must be prepared to carry them. To this end, the consciousness of the Du Boisian child is ideally modeled along trans-generic, trans-atlantic, and trans-generational lines. From the politics and aesthetics of juxtaposition showcased in the epigraphs of *Souls* through the picture/text cross-writing of *The Crisis* Children's Numbers to the double-voiced Crow, Du Bois has moved from a double consciousness that begins in childhood to posit a reimagined model of two-ness as a uniquely resilient subjectivity for the black child in America.

While in *Souls*, Du Bois famously proclaimed that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line," by the time he writes *Darkwater*, some two decades later, his emphasis has shifted. Now, he writes that "All our problems center in the child" (125). I have, in part, been attempting the trace the evolution of double consciousness from *Souls* to its new seat in Du Bois's works for and about children, but the more focused attention to the problems of black childhood, in the place of or in

addition to those of race, brings important differences, particularly between “As the Crow Flies” and *Souls*, into view as well. There is, in comparison to *Souls* and even in comparison to *The Crisis* Children’s Numbers, an important geographical and social widening in “As the Crow Flies” that is consistent with Du Bois’s emerging transnational democratic philosophy,<sup>36</sup> but there is also and simultaneously — in the formulaic patterns and heavily articulated twoness of Du Bois’s *Brownies’ Book* contribution — a tapering off of the heterogeneity that many would identify as a hallmark of *Souls* and which I have argued carries over into the multi-media, multi-contributory layout of the Children’s Numbers as well.

From a practical point of view, one reason for this latter shift is the, already remarked, divergence in aims of *The Brownies’ Book*. Though founded in part by Du Bois, *The Brownies’ Book* represented in practice a compromise to the position Du Bois had long held on black childhood as importantly in need of dialogic exchange with “Age” and concomitantly as necessarily and principally distinct from the conventions governing childhood for white, mainstream America. Without the cross-written features so evident and ironic in the Children’s Numbers, *The Brownies’ Book*, wonder that it was, treated its child audience to a far more consistent and far more conventional reading experience, one which enacted the principle that childhood and adulthood are distinct, separate entities, who should read distinct, separate texts. Where Du Bois had created contrast, as the editor of *The Children’s Numbers*, out of various different media and too out of the stylistically and substantively divergent submissions he received, as an independent

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<sup>36</sup> I would agree with Vilashini Cooppan, “The Double Politics of Double Consciousness: Nationalism and Globalism in *The Souls of Black Folk*,” *Public Culture* 17.2 (2005) 299-318, that the philosophy of double consciousness in *Souls* is consistent with and foundational to Du Bois’s nationally and globally dialectical politics of later years, but this latter investment, while nascent in *Souls*, seems to me far more of a foreground issue in later works such as, in this case, “As the Crow Flies.”

contributor to *The Brownies' Book*, it was for him and him alone to create the double-method and model he sought. While other contributors to *The Brownies' Book* who had also contributed to the Children's Numbers dramatically changed their approach to align it with more conventional children's fare, Du Bois's own work is consistently inconsistent, which is to say that it remains attuned in either context to the complexities of contrast and to the dual awareness necessary in times of struggle and, indeed, of violence.

The other, and to my mind more significant, reason for the formulaic shift in "As the Crow Flies," for the de-muddying of the literary and interpretive waters, so beloved in *Souls*, arises from the distance between the elder text's attempt "in vague and uncertain outline" to represent a complex people and the newer venture to create out of that representation a specific type of person, to take the polarities of the historically divided consciousness and craft a revisionary and resilient double awareness out of their simultaneous suspension. The cross-written Children's Numbers were to a large extent both a polemic for this revised subjectivity implicitly directed at a more conventionally-minded adult body and an attempt to systematize that subjectivity through the replication and repetition of the periodical format. "As the Crow Flies" signaled in one sense a heightening of this agenda, for it followed a vastly more explicit double course and appeared and reappeared in that form much more frequently than had been theretofore possible, but in another sense it was an abandoning of the other aspect of that agenda, over-writing the biological providers of the Brownies to bring them directly, as it were, a new, figurative and actual kind of food. In crafting the Crow as parent, Du Bois figuratively bypasses a group for whom he has had much criticism, and takes his case for



a revised, de-romanticized childhood directly to the child reader. In contrast to “cooped up” Human Folk the world over, and as the new bird parent of the Brownie, the Crow’s subjectivity emblemizes theirs as a two-toned, resilient and sustainable, alternative to the segmented divisions of race, of nation, and of age.

## Chapter Four:

### Drowning in Childhood: Gertrude Stein's Late Modernism

. . . the nineteenth century had been pretty nearly killed but still it was very much alive, it believed in peace and in war, it believed in a possible Esperanto, and in progress, it believed in humanity and the white man's burden . . . And now, except Germany there is really nothing left of the nineteenth century and when that will be exterminated then the nineteenth century is over, and the twentieth century has come to stay. I belong to the generation who born in the nineteenth century spent all the early part of my life in escaping from it, and the rest of it in being the twentieth century yes of course.

--Gertrude Stein, *Wars I Have Seen* (1945), 80.

Several times in my inner life, I had already experienced the process of inoculation as something salutary. In this situation, too, I resolved to follow suit, and I deliberately called to mind those images which, in exile, are most apt to waken homesickness: images of childhood. My assumption was that the feeling of longing would no more gain mastery over my spirit than a vaccine does over a healthy body.

-- Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (revised 1938), 37.

Childhood returns sometimes by day, more often by night. But it was not so with Lewis Carroll. For some reason, we know not what, his childhood was sharply severed. It lodged in him whole and entire. He could not disperse it. And therefore as he grew older this impediment in the centre of his being, this hard block of pure childhood, starved the mature man of nourishment.

-- Virginia Woolf, "Lewis Carroll" (1939), 81-82.

In the shadows WWII, Gertrude Stein, Walter Benjamin, and Virginia Woolf

identify a problem peculiar to modernism: that is, the problem of a life grounded in the culture of the nineteenth century and built (or dashed) in the next. The child "in the centre of . . . being," to borrow from Woolf, is for each a post-Romantic figure, wielding nostalgia like a weapon against its host. Much of the life of the twentieth-century adult is spent laboring with this child in the midst as if it were a disease in need of a vaccine (for Benjamin) or a parasite starving the adult body of nourishment (for Woolf) or a monster of tradition killed only with the utmost difficulty (for Stein). Like being born in the wrong body, being born in the wrong century can have not only a lasting psychological impact but can also require an equally severe response. Benjamin's memoir is purposefully fragmented. In 1938, few homelands could have seemed as transmogrified

as Benjamin's Germany. On the verge of exile from this homeland, these pieces of memory, strategically shattered, are designed to work like a "vaccine." He exposes himself to "images from childhood" in order to cure himself of that signature disease *from* childhood: "homesickness."<sup>1</sup> For Virginia Woolf, Lewis Carroll is the quintessential child man, preserving not just his childhood but its era. The healthy transition from child to adult requires for Woolf not just the attenuation of childhood ("for childhood normally fades slowly") but requires also the attenuation of nineteenth-century conventions. Parallel to Woolf's claim that Carroll preserves, to the detriment of the man, the "hard block of childhood," is her assessment later in the essay that he has likewise internalized, undilute and uninterrupted, "every" (Victorian) "convention" (254). "If Oxford dons in the nineteenth century had an essence," Woolf writes, then Lewis Carroll "was that essence": "prudish, pernickety, pious, and jocose" (254).

For each of these writers and thinkers of late modernism,<sup>2</sup> the nineteenth century is predatorily prolonged as an inner child of sorts. For Stein, perhaps more so than for any other major writer of the period, this was the central problem occupying her work from the mid thirties through the postwar era. After the long-awaited popular success of Stein's 1933 *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein entered an unprecedented (for her) period of writer's block that she personally linked to a profound identity crisis. When she resurfaced in 1934, her writing was noticeably altered by a new investment in children's narratives. In addition to her works "for children": *The World is Round* (1939), *To Do: A*

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin may well be drawing upon the medical history of the term "nostalgia" as coined by Johannes Hofer in 1688. Originally used to diagnose the potentially fatal homesickness of soldiers in wartime, the pathological aspects of nostalgia faded by the turn of the twentieth century according to Robert Hemmings. Increasingly scholars note that the object of longing that nostalgia described shifted from an exterior place or home to an interiorized space and time: childhood.

<sup>2</sup> The term late modernism is usually intended to describe the transitional period, following the dissolution of "high modernism" of the 1920s and the emergence of postmodernism in the fifties and 60s. I use the term historically to refer to modernist writing of the second world war era.

*Book of Alphabets and Birthdays* (1940), and *The Gertrude Stein First Reader* (1941), nearly every work from 1934 through the end of her career in 1946 incorporates children's narratives in one form or other. But overwhelmingly this is a parodic turn. It is the preoccupation of a skeptic. Often, children's narratives are the objects for Stein of a Socratic-style inquest into the role they, as shadow narratives we may call them, play in identity formation. In some the target is Mother Goose where Stein questions the validity of identity by recognition — the validity as she puts it in Mother Goose terms of: "I am I because my little dog knows me." In others, it is a question about personal evolution. Stein often asks: "what is the use of being a little boy if you are growing up to be a man." In others still, Stein uses that quintessential scientific discovery of childhood education — "the world is round and it goes around and around" — to explore the conflicts between identity and socio-political organization.

In *Wars I Have Seen* (1945), written at the height of the second world war, Stein insists with an epic sensibility that the real target of that war is nothing less than a state of mind. In the passage that heads this essay, Germany figures as little more than a straw man for the tyrannies of the nineteenth century. The hope of esperanto or a universal language, the hope of science and a belief in progress, the hope of global civilization or empire all epitomize for Stein the broken if not also foolish promises of the age. And that spirit is further epitomized for Stein by that period's chief mascot: the child. Stein writes that "all" of what the nineteenth century stood for was "between babyhood and fourteen," or she rephrases it another way: "It was the nineteenth century between babyhood and fourteen, and the nineteenth century dies hard . . ." (16). Equating an entire century with the first 14 years of life may seem like simple bad math, but modern childhood, like

centuries for Stein, is stocked full of preservatives to prolong its shelf life, sometimes indefinitely. This is the essential paradox of post-Romantic childhood — at once limited in time (here to 14 years) and yet haunting. If the nineteenth century dies hard, so too by implication does this child. If the nineteenth century is a target for death, so too is this child.

In *Wars I Have Seen*, Stein takes explicit aim at the nineteenth century. Over and over again she describes her attempts “to kill” the nineteenth century — “to kill it dead, quite like a gangster with a . . . tommy gun” (91), she says at one point, or to kill it “dead as a doornail” in another (104). By November 1943, with the war winding down, Stein pronounces the nineteenth century dead, “stone dead” (96). Long deaths are very nearly a trademark of nineteenth-century narratives such that Stein’s verbal bludgeoning seems both like a parody and a genuine assault. Stein’s attack on the post-Romantic child takes much the same form. Children die or nearly die in Stein’s children’s narratives in numbers and in ways that are as disturbing as they are familiar. In *The World is Round*, Stein’s two protagonists Rose and her cousin, Willie, nearly drown on multiple occasions. In *The Gertrude Stein First Reader* the make-believe drama of “Three Sisters Who Were Not Sisters” is comprised entirely by a series of exercises in children killing children. In *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*, five children die by drowning, two are eaten, and one is starved. Children who are drowned (or nearly drowned) or who are eaten (or nearly eaten) are favored subjects of much children’s literature. Stories of babes lost in the wood, like “Hansel and Gretel” and “Little Red Riding Hood,” caution readers that predators — from witches to wolves — are ubiquitously, so it seems, on the

prowl for the unchaperoned (abandoned, lost, or pseudo-autonomous) child.<sup>3</sup> Like the child-dinner, the child-drowned trope has also served to reinforce as vital the relationship between children and their adult protectors. Stein herself recalls reading Mary Mapes Dodge's story of "Donald and Dorothy," twins rescued at sea by the heroic actions of such caretakers. Donald and Dorothy do not drown but their parents do, exemplifying to the extreme the counterbalance between child survival and adult sacrifice.

U.C. Knoepfelmacher describes the phenomenon of the child nearly-drowned as a literary device that locks children into roles of vulnerability while also demanding that adults play their parts as the responsible saviors thereof. All told, Knoepfelmacher assesses the death-by-drowning trope as a powerful nineteenth-century device for compartmentalizing and preserving childhood as a world apart from the demands and disappointments of adult reality. Even if worldly rescue fails in this literature — death-by-drowning could still mean the spiritual salvation of children for childhood. The hero of Kingsley's *Water Babies* (1863) is rescued and restored to childhood in precisely this way. Here a poor, young chimney sweep receives a moral education and finds redemption in the alternate, fairy tale reality under water. Knoepfelmacher concludes that "the nineteenth century imagination frequently associated childhood spaces with the oblivion of a death-by-drowning" (299). This particular kind of oblivion underscores the already strong connection between post-Romantic notions of childhood and other-worldly spaces. Drowning can mean a kind of worldly escape. Near-drowning can sound

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<sup>3</sup> In *Voracious Children*, Carolyn Daniel describes two important cultural narratives that lay behind the cannibalism of children in children's fairy tales. Citing Marianne Rumpf, she describes one of these as a caution to children against strangers, cast in the roles of witches, werewolves, and ogres. Another, according to Daniel was to represent the problems of widespread famine in which the cannibalism of the child is sometimes (though not always) a euphemism for the abandonment of children by their parents ("Hairy on the Inside" 145-146).

an alarm, ringing in the rescue and refortification of the child. The drowning trope in nineteenth century fiction can thus be a vehicle for keeping children in their idyllic separate sphere or of returning them to it.

Stein's deployment of these common childhood death tropes calls upon this history while challenging its symbolic end-game. One of Stein's signature epiphanies in *Wars I Have Seen* is that "there is a mingling [of] children's lives and grown up lives" in times of war (7). Stein's children's narratives are wartime narratives not just in their timing but in their manifestation of this principle of mingling. The violence in these narratives is both cloaked and heightened by an ordinary, everydayness that collapses the separate spheres of child and adult representation.<sup>4</sup> They offer no after-the-violence narrative catharsis, no parental rescue, sometimes no rescue at all, and no afterlife. Clearly, these are texts which also pay little heed to the bulwarks separating children's literature from its elder relative. Few could envision the works that Stein designated for children — *The World is Round*, *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*, and *The Gertrude Stein First Reader* — as children's literature. But few could envision them as modernist either. Tyrus Miller in theorizing late modernism has emphasized the literary violence of these works. It is a violence which is not just thematic — though it is that — but which is also structural. "[L]ate modernist works," he writes, "dramatized the comic fragility of modernist attempts to contain contingency and violence aesthetically, through literary form"; "Within the late modernist novel," he continues, "the formal 'lapses'

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<sup>4</sup> Lisi Schoenbach has illuminated the experimental, "shock[ing]" deployment of habits and habitual writing in Stein's "pragmatic" modernism. Schoenbach argues that "Stein takes as one of her most serious engagements the duty of rendering habit visible: from the minutiae of daily life, to textual 'habits' such as punctuation and cliché, to the habits that constitute national identity, to the collective habits of thought that create institutions and literary canons. Even Stein's most radically experimental works famously achieve their difficulty through repetitions. Her readers face not shocks *per se* but habit made visible through sheer exaggeration" (245).

bound to laughter allowed expression of those negative forces of the age that could not be coaxed into any admirable design of words: its violence, madness, absurd contingencies, and sudden deaths” (20). Though Miller does not treat Stein’s work directly, this description clearly brings her wartime writing into the field of late modernism. In fact, in addition to her plays, this description suits her children’s literature best of all, where violence and absurd contingencies and sudden deaths prosper with the abundance of the everyday. Stein doesn’t just venture into children’s literature, she invades it, producing deconstructed, sardonic versions of the alphabet book, the first reader, the nursery rhyme, and the fairy tale forms. At the same time, she explodes the formal, innovative reifications of much of “high modernism” by embracing popular forms and even more importantly by challenging the youth-centered spirit of newness at modernism’s innovative core. In other words, Stein’s late modernism is arguably centered around her experiments in children’s narrative.

Stein hypothesizes a new “mingled” subject for wartime, and she produces a new genre of mingled children’s and modernist narrative. Her use of the child-drowning trope clearly derives from children’s literature, but the terms in which she challenges that trope also come from modernism. Marianne DeKoven has usefully offered the metaphor of “sea-change” to describe modernism’s attraction to water imagery and also to describe its particular, ambivalent relationship to that imagery’s symbolic and pre-symbolic significations. Drowning in modernism signifies “death,” “suffering,” and “horror” as well as “redemptive transformation,” “resurrection,” and “rebirth” (3). In Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier’s drowning is at once a suicide and a feminist rebellion against the strictures of “True Womanhood.” In T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, “Fear death



by water” is a terrifying but also captivating prophesy. The image of the drowned Phoenician Sailor captures the threat of a death-by-drowning but also suggests the potential for a “positive sea-change, ‘those are pearls that were his eyes’” (DeKoven 192). These drownings evoke a return to the womb. DeKoven analyzes these images in the terms of modernism’s ambivalent relationship to the feminine, but they also evoke a tandem ambivalence to childhood. When Edna swims irretrievably out into the ocean, she feels “new-born,” like a “little child,” but she abandons her own children in order to effect this return to childhood (Chopin 152).

The turn from child forms to children’s narratives marks a heightened shift from the aesthetic to the political, from representing the child subject to engaging that subject. And in Stein’s case the terms of this engagement are distinctly modernist: deconstructive, ambivalent, ironic, and violent. And yet the turn to the new genre and new audience represented by children’s literature — a turn in which Stein was joined by Langston Hughes, T.S. Eliot, Djuna Barnes, Carl Sandburg, W.E.B. Du Bois and many more of her fellow American modernists — must be acknowledged as part of a late modernist push against and away from the formal and cultural structures of high modernist innovation. Edna Pontellier affirms, like so many emergent and canonical modernist protagonists, the youth discourse at the heart of modernism’s “make it new” mantra. But Stein’s children’s narratives of this era are preoccupied with representing and with killing children, with writing and with destroying children’s narratives, with engaging child (and adult) readers and attacking childhood. Together, these paradoxical aims suggest that Stein’s real target is not just the image of childhood but is the living, breathing mentality of that image. Stein’s late modernism targets the child within so many concentric circles of the self,

American culture, and modernism. She takes aim at precisely what Virginia Woolf contemporaneously identifies as the “impediment in the centre of . . . being,” but by structuring this project across the genres of modernism and children’s literature it must be said that Stein raises the aesthetic, political, and cultural stakes in ways that few others did and perhaps dared to do.

### **Death-by-Disappearance in *To Do*:**

In “The Winner Loses, A Picture of Occupied France” (1940), Stein reflects on her efforts to assuage the anxiety she felt at the onset of WWII, an anxiety inflicted most sharply by the urgings of friends that she leave what was in many ways her dream home in her chosen nation of Bilgnin, France. In the interim, between these urgings and her ultimate decision to stay among friends rather than to “risk” herself elsewhere “among strangers” (121), Stein writes *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*. In her words:

I had begun the beginning of May [1940] to write a book for children, a book of alphabets with stories for each letter, and a book of birthdays,--each story had to have a birthday in it,--and I did get so that I could not think about the war but just about the stories I was making up for this book. I would walk in the daytime and make up stories, and I walked up and down on the terrace in the evening and made up stories, and I went to sleep making up stories, and I pretty well did succeed in keeping my mind off the war except for the three times a day when there was the French communiqué, and that always gave me a sinking feeling in my stomach . . . . (117)

As Stein relates it, *To Do* represents an absorbing and remarkably successful distraction from the anxieties of wartime.<sup>5</sup> Yet, Stein’s description of *To Do* in this instance is largely misleading. The language of evasion does not apply thematically to *To Do* which substantially represents the emotional and physical violences of wartime. Likewise the

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<sup>5</sup> Barbara Will, for one, takes this description by Stein at face-value as evidence for the “escapist” quality of Stein’s children’s literature (“And Then” 343). Nor is Will alone. Escapism is a term that often comes up in accounts of Stein’s wartime writing of this period. Many would agree with Liesl Olson that “Stein’s response to World War II was to keep her life as consistent and as pleasurable as possible” (91). And Gill Plain points out that escapist literature grew in general during the second world war (14-15).

language of absorption and distraction understates the esteemed position that *To Do* held for Stein among her own works. While *To Do* clearly served a pragmatic purpose for its author, Stein's correspondence testifies to the value that she came to place on this particular children's narrative. Almost every letter from 1940 through 1941 that Stein writes to longtime friend and professional liaison Carl Van Vechten, or "Papa Woojums" as she likes to call him, seeks to advance the publication of *To Do*. At times Stein nearly pleads with Van Vechten that he like the book as much as she does. In August of 1940, she writes, ". . . most and foremost I want to know how you feel about it, send me by cable or air-mail, a word, we are suffering for a word from you, and tell me if you like it, I myself am attached to it" (678). Stein apparently failed to receive Van Vechten's responses, for she writes again in October to Papa Woojums from Baby Woojums: "You do like the book don't you because if you didn't I would know it was no good but you do, and I can't help being sure that the stories are very Frank Stocktonish, and that you know I think awfully high praise to Baby Woojums, please like the book . . ." (685).<sup>6</sup> Frank Stockton was a wildly successful writer of modern fairy tales for children in the late nineteenth century whose work went on to be reprinted and illustrated by the likes of Maurice Sendak (of *Where the Wild Things Are* fame) and whose "The Lady, or the Tiger?" has become a school-anthology mainstay. Stein would have likely become familiar with Stockton's work as a child reader herself of *St. Nicholas Magazine*, for which Stockton was an assistant editor and longtime contributor. Stein's comparison of

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<sup>6</sup> Many of Van Vechten and Stein's letters were apparently lost to each other in the heightened atmosphere of surveillance and hampered transatlantic communications of this wartime period. Van Vechten frequently complains in his letters to Stein of this period that he "write[s] and write[s] and cable[s] and cable[s]" Stein "but nothing seems to get through" (11 September 1940, printed in *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten*). Stein herself responded to Van Vechten about the publication of *To Do* by mailing out multiple version of the same letter to him on the same day. Edward Burns notes that "one possible explanation for this is that Stein was deeply concerned about the publication of this book and she wanted to make sure that at least one message got through to Van Vechten" (685).

her own work and style to Stockton's speaks not only to her growing personal fondness for *To Do* but also to the high literary-esteem she has come to place upon it.

Remarkable as it may seem to readers of *To Do* then and still, Stein appears sincere in her belief in this narrative's popular potential. In the same letter where Stein compares herself to Stockton, she relates to Van Vechten the rejection she has had from John McCullough of Scott Publishers, who had just the year prior published Stein's *The World is Round*. Stein's disappointment comes with a healthy dose of sarcasm: "he has not yet tried it on the children and he seems to think that even if the children like it, they would not want to try it" (685). Perhaps most telling, one of Stein's first post-war communications to Van Vechten picks up, nearly four years later, where these letters leave off: ". . . was *To Do* ever done . . ." (765). It was not done. All along the news of *To Do*'s reception, even as filtered through the doting Van Vechten, had truly provided little basis for Stein's persistent optimism about the work. Everyone, from Scott Publishers to Stein's contracted Random House publisher to Harcourt, had felt that *To Do* was not for children. This was a sentiment that Van Vechten too, in a rare moment of qualified sycophancy, expressed to Stein: "I'm MAD about [*To Do*] but I hardly think it is for les enfants" (679), "especially as you say letters M and N are unlucky and half the children who read it will be named Nathan and Mary (680). While Van Vechten is turned off by the darkness of *To Do*, others are numbed by the coldness of its prose. Cerf from Random House wrote to Van Vechten that everyone at Random House was "as cold as a slab of alabaster" about *To Do* (697N), suggesting that the reality of the responses to *To Do* may have been much harsher than even Van Vechten, who so often shielded Stein from criticism, let on.

*To Do* is both cold and dark. Though it may have been conceived as an escape from war, *To Do* holds more fear and violence than it deflects. Throughout its pages children and animals die with deadpan insistence. In this modernist alphabet book, Stein pairs each letter with the names of four children and the stories about their birthdays, but unlike its namesakes, *To Do* is not a narrative of creation. Instead of projecting alphabets and birthdays as building blocks of language and of self, *To Do* places these elements at the center of various narratives of violent disintegration, loss, and death-by-disappearance.

Brave, for B, is the first of many children to drown in *To Do*. The picture Stein paints of Brave has many of the markings of cautionary tale. Brave lacks humility. He is self-professedly “rich and strong.” He is white “with delight.” The world is his oyster, or, as Stein puts it, “any day might be his birthday.” Brave is also bold. Upon meeting A is for Annie he quickly decides both that she is like honey and that he will give her all of his money, a move that speaks both to his patriarchal privilege and to his impending death. Showing that Brave is not so much courageous as cock-sure, Stein hones in on his character’s ill-fated habit of fishing at night with a light.

Brave always fished at night with a light. Nobody should because that dazzles the fish and they cannot see where for the glare so it is not fair. But Brave did he fished at night with a light. And tonight, yes tonight, he was drowned at night, drowned dead at night, and Never Sleeps barked all night and Was Asleep was asleep and Annie had all his money and she spent it on honey and Brave was never any more white with delight. And the fish could rest every night.

That is what happens when you are not born on your birthday, that is what everybody does say . . . (10-11).

Brave’s death appears the net-effect of so many causes. The offspring of imperial, patriarchal power, Brave both has too much and risks too much. His patronage of Annie is as absolute as is his unconscionable lack of sportsmanship. It would be easy for

readers, particularly those familiar with Stein's longstanding critique of patriarchy, to pinpoint Brave's power, his arrogance, his wealth, his bad-faith hunting methods, or his whiteness, each separately or all together, as his fatal flaw. Yet *To Do* undermines each of these more obviously just causes in favor of the most morally and rationally opaque: Brave was not born on his birthday. At one end of the life-spectrum, not being born on your birthday might mean a refusal of origins or, at the other, it could signal a false claim to immortality. It could suggest an inability to recognize one's own human limitations. It could indicate an excess of celebratory zeal.

Or, it could be nonsense. The text's efforts to pass the expression off as a centuries' old saying seems disingenuous at best and suggests some narrative comedy is underfoot. Though framed as a cautionary tale, Brave's story arouses none of the pathos that such tales traditionally inspire. But Brave dies without ceremony, without agony, pity, or even clear cause. Far from a cautionary tale about the dangers of drowning, this may well be a story about the dangers of such cautionary tales. While the story of Brave seems to insist upon his death as a lesson to readers, at last the text appears to diffuse any possibility for deciphering or perhaps more importantly for caring what that lesson is. While readers might spend some time pondering the metaphysical contours of being or not being born on your birthday as a matter of choice, not only is there no "how to" for this "to do," but the text goes some distance to make Brave and all he may or may not stand for as forgettable as possible. Brave has two dogs, Never Sleeps and Was Asleep. Following Brave's death, "Never Sleeps barked all night and Was Asleep was asleep." And Annie, who "had all his money," spent it all "on honey." Like this sing-song rhyme, the rhythms of life go on without missing a beat. Brave's death has produced, it seems,

not so much as a ripple, pardon the pun, on the lives of those who survive him. Even though it comes so early in the book, Brave's death doesn't seem like much. The narrator, the reader, and the text barely register his loss. As a mock cautionary tale, Brave's is a childhood that is wholly lost. There is no suggestion that it lives on in the sphere of spiritual symbolism, a space haunted by so many of literature's children. The text iterates Brave's death with an insistence reminiscent of Stein's attacks on the nineteenth century. He "drowned at night"; he "drowned dead at night." Brave disappears in the darkness, and he disappears underwater. His drowning is an emblem of the kind of child death that permeates *To Do*. His is a death-by-disappearance. Brave disappears from view, from life, from memory, and quite unceremoniously from the text. This is not just a story of how Brave drowned, this is a story that participates in his submergence.

Brave's is only the first of many deaths in *To Do*. All of the J's — James, Jonas, Jewel and Jenny die a similar death to his. These siblings lose or damage their birthdays in the process of playing with them or fighting over them. They all, like Brave, drown and they do so for far less cause and without much narrative *to-do*. Easily the saddest story in *To Do* is the story of George. George technically has a birthday — it's April Fools' Day — but this timing is so unfortunate that it represents more of a false start to life than the sure footing of a true birthday. Stein devotes a full five pages to mounting the melancholy of George's character. Like his birthday, George lacks substance. Literally. He is "so thin," Stein writes, that he is "next to nothing." On the verge of invisibility — or death, George goes away, taking nothing but "five rich American cookies" and a camera. Stein writes:

. . . he could take one photograph a day but that was not enough to pay his way,  
he had no way to pay, poor George poor dear thin George poor dear thin grey-

haired George poor George he was away there is nothing more to say poor dear thin grey-haired George he was a thin grey-haired boy and he had no toy and he had no joy and the lightning and thunder were brighter and louder and the big tree was bigger and he was thinner . . . and pretty soon and in every way George dear George began to fade away, fade fade away . . . .

There are strong parallels between George's story and the story of youth that Stein tells elsewhere in her wartime writing. In *Paris France*, what epitomizes the wartime experience of the child, Helen Button, is the loss of her best friend Emil and his dog, both of whom vanish suddenly and without explanation. Whether they went away "to the war or not Helen never knew" (92). Stein captures the feeling of impermanence, "There are so many people who go away in wartime and there are always so many everywhere in wartime here there and everywhere" (92). Estranged from so many familiars and surrounded by so many strangers, modern communities and homes that have for so long organized themselves around the children in their midst find themselves in wartime facing an empty center. In *Wars I Have Seen* Stein analogizes the communal anxiety that young men will suddenly be "carried off from them in their midst" to a kind of cultural kidnapping which she likens to a return to "the middle ages." What Helen Button perceives and what Stein then turns into an emblematic realization is that there can be neither any protection for the children and youth of war nor any adult identification with the role of being their protectors. Both are vulnerable. It is easy, she writes, elsewhere in *Wars I Have Seen* in times of war "to know what children feel" — not just to "remember about [the] feeling" of childhood but to "just feel the feeling" (7).

For there to be a mingling of children's and grown up lives means that the opposing walls of this social structure have failed, collapsing inward upon one another. The mingling is in the rubble. Stein paints this mingling into George who with his rich



American cookies and his gray hair makes for a strange mosaic. Stein's multiple depictions of the child in wartime converge most in her insistence that George "fade[s] away" "in every way." George goes away, inexplicably and unprepared, like so many of the young men during war time. But the fading of George is much more graphically a wartime image that points from so many angles to the problem of hunger. Fading in George's case is a lot like starving. And, it must be said, it is also much like being consumed. The strength of the storm grows and the big tree gets bigger while George gets progressively thinner. Stein's way of accumulating descriptors to and around George — "poor dear thin grey-haired George" — helps to suggest the weight of the circumstances that finally engulf him. But George does not simply fade in body, he also fades away as an image. With his camera in tow George's vocation is both to convert experience into image and to preserve it as such. Reduced to black and white, to stillness, and to two-dimensional form, the photograph is yet an externalized analog of the mind, seeking to capture and preserve the past, however selectively, however unreliably. Frozen beneath the tall tree (and George is literally freezing from the cold), with his graying hair and his increasingly frail physique George seems like an old photograph — being drained of color and motion, as of life. Like his vocation which cannot sustain his life, this image of George fails to do what most images are designed to do: preserve the subject. As a subject George is under erasure. Stein's insistence that George fades away "in every way" points at last to the final stage of his disappearance. As with *Brave*, this happens at the level of the narrative. It would seem no coincidence that the words "faded away" serve also as the final terms of Stein's narrative about George. After that, George is again reduced (or erased) back to "G" only. "After G is H for Henry" captures the strange

alphabetical momentum of *To Do*. Rather than moving through object lessons of the “A is for apple” variety, *To Do*’s alphabet moves through children’s lives. The signifier alone is the engine that drives the traditional alphabet forward — from A to Z. Stein’s alphabet book insists on the inseparability of signifiers and what they signify — the end of G it would seem also means the end of George.

The sense of *To Do* as a distinctly wartime alphabet book intensifies as the narrative approaches Z. Like the many drownings in *To Do*, like the fading of George, Xantippe and Xenophon also appear in the roll-call of *To Do* only to vanish pages later. They are swallowed whole. Xantippe and Xenophon spend their narrative trying to outmaneuver the five men and ten women who are following them. They try exchanging the X’s that begin their names and they try exchanging birthdays, but they cannot shake their pursuers.

All of a sudden, the five men and ten women they walked so quickly they walked right into Xenophon and Xantippe and as they walked into them all five of them the men and all ten of them the women opened their mouths as if they were yawning and just then Xenophon and Xantippe disappeared down the mouths of them and no one ever saw Xantippe and Xenophon again and the ten women and five men went away.

And now we have Xylophone and Xmas.

As with the story of George, the story of Xantippe and Xenophon seems a thinly veiled wartime narrative. These are the relatives-in-kind of the children suddenly “carried off from them in their midst” that Stein describes years later in *Wars I Have Seen*. Xantippe and Xenophon are marked by the X’s that begin their names. The “X” is, of course, a notorious symbol of death, but it may also gesture toward the Star of David that was used to identify and to mark so many Jews during WWII. And though the ten women and the five men bear a remarkable Gestapo-likeness, they are in some ways more ominous

because they seem more ordinary, everyday — an affect largely achieved by having women outnumber men two to one. Everything about passages like this one suggests how commonplace these occurrences are — at least in the world of Stein’s narrative which it seems more and more likely is also the world of WWII. Xantippe and Xenophon are marked by the X’s that begin their names, and they are swallowed without ceremony. Brave doesn’t just drown. He drowns dead. The adverb seems unnecessary. Drowning by definition is dying, but where the modern child of the cult of childhood is concerned this clarification is radically informative. George’s death is the most alive on the page but is also absolute. Stein’s insistence that he faded away in “every way,” leaves nothing of George to be saved.

Stein’s use of these well-worn childhood-death tropes is radical because it does nothing to save children for childhood. But Stein’s use of the alphabet book genre designed for a child audience is far more radical because it would appear to be targeting notions of childhood in actual children. The choice of the alphabet book is ripe with significance, for it is a genre not only almost exclusively associated with childhood and child readers but it is also a genre imagined almost universally as formative of childhood interiority. The alphabet book is written for children to make children. In what Patricia Crain has described as the “Alphabetization of America,” the alphabet — as the cornerstone of literacy — has become by the nineteenth century the cornerstone as well of a standardized, progressive subjectivity. Alphabetization, Crain writes, “becomes more than a rite of initiation. It is now the primary means of socialization, the lack of which renders one not just *déclassé* . . . but subhuman” (103). *To Do* clearly projects the alphabet book in this vein: as a genre of identity. The formative power of the genre is

exemplified by the way Stein associates each letter — not with an object, animal, or action — but with a set of names.

But as with the death-by-drowning trope, Stein breaks with this standard. In her text, alphabets and birthdays are traditions that are not just questionable, they are also implicitly violent. Stein's death-by-disappearance trope functions on at least three different levels — on one level it suggests the context of war in which Stein was writing and suggests the extent to which children were inextricably in the midst of that war. Second, it suggests the important role that violence came to play for Stein in this period as a narrative tool for deconstructing what she perceived as ideological and narrative enemies. Stein commits a violence toward the alphabet book by writing a version that has almost no chance of teaching the alphabet but every chance of darkening its already difficult reputation. But Stein's strongest act of narrative violence is to attach these death tropes quite integrally to a genre of which they had never really been a part. By emphasizing the way that X's mark Xantippe and Xenophon for annihilation and the sure death that having the wrong or no birthday requires, Stein suggests that there is not only something truly ridiculous about these structures of identity formation but that there is also something predatorily consuming about them as well. What Crain refers to as initiation and socialization, Stein might well call cannibalism or drowning.

### **Drowning in Children's Narratives:**

The drowning that is delivered with such literalized force in Stein's children's literature is more of a conceptual splinter, underlying and inflaming Stein's adult meditations on identity formation following the 1933 success of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. And in this way the child characters who are actually swallowed up and

drowned in Stein's parodic children's narratives lift the veil, so to speak, on what has long been an embedded problem for Stein: that is the altogether ironic drowning power of these narratives of education and growth. While many critics and admirers alike have noted a childlike or childish quality in Stein's work, very little scholarship has focused on the connections between Stein's preoccupation with narratives from childhood and her actual literature for children.<sup>7</sup> But for Stein, who often embraced the view of her poetry as "children's poetry," these lines are unsurprisingly blurred.<sup>8</sup> Praise like Laura Riding's 1928 assessment that "None of the words Miss Stein uses have ever had an experience. They are no older than her use of them" or the Robert S. Warshow's 1946 memorial essay that opens with the tribute: "The chief thing Gertrude Stein tried to do was write as if she had kept her innocence" or even Dr. Schmalhausen's 1929 no-holds-barred insult that "Gertrude's mental age is 12, her emotional age is 14, her artistic age is 7," all are drawn to (or repulsed by) an essentialized type of child language associated with Stein's portraits and poems of the teens and twenties.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, late Stein not only develops a serious politics of childhood (Stein shared the radical view that children should have the right to vote)<sup>10</sup> but is also more interested in and troubled by children's narratives — that is, not the supposed language of children but the language so neatly arranged and packaged for children by adults. In her children's literature these narratives take on the parodic shape of the alphabet book, the fairy tale, and the first reader. In her adult work,

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<sup>7</sup> Barbara Will's work on Stein is a notable exception.

<sup>8</sup> In "A Transatlantic Interview" Stein links her work in *Tender Buttons* with her current work in writing children's books as some her best poetic work (23).

<sup>9</sup> The passages by Laura Riding (132) and Dr. Schmalhausen (133) are quoted in Karen Leick's article on "Gertrude Stein and the Making of Celebrity." Robert Warshow's tribute (140) can found in full in Kirk Curnutt's *The Critical Response to Gertrude Stein*.

<sup>10</sup> In "A Transatlantic Interview," Stein expresses her belief that "Just as everybody has the vote, including the women, I think children should, because as soon as a child is conscious of itself, then it has to me an existence and has a stake in what happens" (17).

Stein condenses her focus on singular sentences which nonetheless represent canonic children's narrative forms. Stein meditates on the problem of identity anchored by an external subject through the nursery rhyme ("I am I because my little dog knows me"), repeatedly questions the coming-of-age narrative of organic growth and cultural assimilation ("what is the use of being a little boy if you are growing up to be a man"), and challenges the quasi-imperialism of narratives of scientific discovery ("the world is round it goes around and around"). Each of these narratives traditionally offers both a soothing and a smoothing representation of life-history, normativizing the subject and naturalizing a whole set of uneven relationships of power across species, ages, and peoples the world over.

Jacqueline Rose has provocatively argued that there are no children in children's literature; rather children's fiction is populated by adults' romantic fantasies of childhood. Devoid of children yet directed at children, children's literature for Rose is part of a colonizing enterprise that "sets up a world in which the adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver)" (1-2). Many scholars of children's literature have rightly qualified Rose's extreme and extremetizing view of the child and adult in children's literature.<sup>11</sup> Rose's interest in imperializing narratives, in psychoanalysis, and in J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* as a case study are all choices that are steeped in the culture and concerns of modernism and modernity. Far from acknowledging this connection, Rose actually laments the absence of a modernist children's literature, even as she immerses herself in a text which was arguably seminal

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<sup>11</sup> Kimberley Reynolds argues that Rose "overlooks the ambivalent nature of many images of childhood, including in children's literature, past and present" (5). Marah Gubar likewise argues that "the habit of defining childhood in terms of primitive purity is not nearly as widespread as [Rose] implies" and furthermore takes issue with Rose's claim that, for the makers of children's literature, the ideal child reader is passive and uncritical (30-31).

to that very enterprise (142). It is possible, I wish to suggest, that Rose's dystopic view of children's narratives might have something to do with the modernist literature she studies. Her pessimism is most certainly predated by J.M. Barrie's. Years after Peter Pan's runaway success Barrie continued to insist that there is something sinister about Peter that cultural adaptations missed.<sup>12</sup> The division between the narrator of *Peter and Wendy* (1911) and the child protagonist, Peter Pan, is quintessentially modernist in its ironic distance. In fact, in *Peter and Wendy* it is Peter and not the narrator who most embodies the "heartless" ideologies of masculine imperialism. By the end of *Peter and Wendy*, readers may note the narrator's explicit move to represent him/her self as a "servant" to the text and to the Darling family, a choice that aligns him with another character in the novel — not Peter but rather — the children's St. Bernard, Nana (135). Peter Pan remains a boy imperialist at the end. In fact his empire and authority have grown. After defeating Hook, Peter alone carries the title of "Captain" (134).

Though Jacqueline Rose was right that the field of modernist children's literature has been remarkably dry, at least in the sense of academic recognition, it is possible that reconceptualizations of children's literature, like hers, framed by postcolonialism and poststructuralism to question the social constructedness of the child in children's literature, may find modernism's children's literature among their literary ancestors. Barrie's *Peter Pan* is only one example of many modernist efforts to unveil the failings of a post-Romantic child ideal. Peter Pan's immortal innocence achieves its immortal power at a price. An oft-overlooked lesson of *Peter and Wendy*, delivered by Wendy, is that it is "only the gay and innocent and heartless who can fly" (148). Stein's indictment

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<sup>12</sup> Asked to respond, for example, to Sir George Frampton's statue of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens (commissioned and paid for by Barrie), Barrie nonetheless expressed his dissatisfaction that "It doesn't show the Devil in Peter" (qtd. in Birkin 202).

of the post-Romantic child-ideal similarly identifies the violence that such an ideal requires and wields for its own sustenance. But what is subtle in Barrie is emblazoned in Stein. Stein's work most clearly raises the issue of modernism's potential role in the changing landscape of children's literary criticism because for her the violence of the post-Romantic child-ideal is concentrated most, as it is for scholars like Rose, in children's narratives. Stein precedes postmodern critics of children's literature in her assessment that narratives, particularly children's narratives, do not just shape identity, they occupy it. In "A Transatlantic Interview" the problems of narrative, mental imperialism, war, and childhood form a crucial nexus for how Stein envisions her wartime aesthetic:

A young French poet had begun to write, and I was asked to translate his poems, and there I made a rather startling discovery that other people's words are quite different from one's own, and that they can not be the result of your internal troubles as a writer. They have a totally different sense than when they are your own words. This solved for me the problem of Shakespeare's sonnets, which are so unlike any of his other work. These may have been his own idea, undoubtedly they were, but the words have none of the violence that exists in any of the poems, in any of the plays. They have a roughness and violence in their juxtaposition which the sonnets do not have, and this brought me to a great deal of illumination of narrative, because most narrative is based not about your opinions but upon someone else's.

Therefore narrative has a different concept than poetry or even exposition, because, you see, the narrative in itself is not what is in your mind but what is in somebody else's. ...

Then I became more and more interested in the subject of narration, and my work since this, the bulk of my work since then, has been largely narration, and I had done children's stories. I think *Paris*, *France* and *Wars I have Seen* are among the most successful of this. (19-20)

It is important that narratives are not defined by any particular genre or form in this passage. The two examples of narration that Stein provides as quintessential to her insights are not taken from prose but from poetry. She has been asked to translate certain works of a French poet; she has been troubled by Shakespeare's sonnets. Narrative is



defined rather as that which has already been written, already thought. The mental aspect of narrative is not to be overlooked. Stein compares the process of writing narratives to being possessed, psychologically by the mind and by the words of another. What helps to identify narrative as narrative, for Stein, is its smoothness. The submission of one mind to another is visible on the page. There is an absence of “roughness and violence.” One sees surrender. Stein’s subsequent professment that since *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (a work which Stein now says she had written as a “joke”), “the bulk of [her] work since then, has been largely narration” is seeped in irony. Irony since Stein has often appeared to place her “genius” apart from and indeed above the minds of all others. Irony since these narratives are clearly no strangers to violence. (*Paris France* and *Wars I Have Seen* are both wartime narratives.) Though Stein professes that most of her wartime writings are narratives, these ironies underscore the extent to which they are also anti-narratives. Like Benjamin who immerses himself in memories of childhood in order to inoculate himself against those self-same memories, Stein turns not just to narratives but to children’s narratives as a privileged site for their contestation. Stein’s late modernism very *nearly* drowns in the childhood of the nineteenth century — in narratives of alphabets, birthdays, and evolution — in order to dismantle their narrative and subjective hold.<sup>13</sup>

From the beginning, Stein’s use of the nursery rhyme theme, “I am I because my little dog knows me,” is as much about writing as it is about identity. The expression makes its first appearance in the 1931 *How to Write* as part of the question: “What is a

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<sup>13</sup> This method is not unique to Stein’s children’s narratives. As Marianne DeKoven has shown, Stein’s experimental writing, at every stage of her career, frequently staged itself as the very thing that it sought to subvert. She “titles ‘Patriarchal Poetry,’” for example, “with the name of what its writing demolishes: sense, coherence, lucidity, hierarchical order . . .” (*A Different Language* 129).

sentence for if I am I then my little dog knows me” (19). Stein was rarely a fan of such sentences. For her the only prosaic evil that surpassed the sentence was the paragraph. In “Poetry and Grammar” Stein expressed the problem as two-fold. Not only do sentences and paragraphs subordinate the diversity of the individual word to the meaning of the whole but each also creates, perhaps strives to create, a state of “balance” (322) as between various parts of speech, between subject and predicate, or between sentences. “One and one make two,” Stein writes of natural prose, when the trick is to “go on counting by one and one” (324). In the world of grammar, as with most everything else, Stein has favorites. She prefers nouns because nouns can stand alone, and Stein prefers that they do. The independent linguistic and subjective complexities of the “I am I” and the “little dog” are overwritten by the relationship that the sentence imposes between them.

But that quintessential sentence about sentences makes a more pronounced and enduring debut in “And Now.” Written some two years after *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, “And Now” reflects on Stein’s struggle with writer’s block following the astonishing success of *The Autobiography*:

What happened to me was this. When the success began and it was a success I got lost completely lost. You know the nursery rhyme, I am I because my little dog knows me. Well you see I did not know myself, I lost my personality. It has always been completely included in myself my personality as any personality naturally is, and here all of a sudden, I was not just I because so many people did know me. It was just the opposite of I am I because my little dog knows me. So many people knowing me I was I no longer and for the first time since I had begun to write I could not write . . . . (63)

To capture the dysfunctional relationship between identity and creative expression, Stein returns to a lesson from childhood. And at first, she appears to affirm the logic of the mother goose. “You know the nursery rhyme,” she writes, and in so writing she confers

upon the poem the weight of common knowledge. She likewise complements her reader with the expression of assumed intelligence. Stein assumes that her readers will know, as by heart, the poem from childhood, and she makes the further assessment that, knowing this, they will also understand her predicament. Stein imagines herself in this passage as sharing much with her readers: of sharing this common memory (and memorization) from childhood, first and foremost, but the mode of the essay is also confessional. In affirming her audience to the extent that she does — by addressing them informally and sincerely twice — and also by affirming what they share, Stein deepens the sense of their connection, a connection that would seem to echo the dynamic between woman and pet in the poem.

On the other hand, the content of what Stein confesses stands in opposition to each of these formal, rhetorical gestures: “. . . all of a sudden,” she writes, “I was not just I because so many people did know me.” What Stein is confessing to her readers is nothing less than the problem that they themselves pose to her. What Stein assumes her audience will understand is the role they have played in her identity crisis. Stein “no longer knew [her]self” because her audience, in some senses, got inside her. Like the poem, Stein imagines that she too has become common knowledge, that she has been internalized by others, and worries that this process has and must have repercussions for her and anyone who is a person and not a poem. Stein’s abrupt turn from affirming the poem as common knowledge to questioning its truth-value may serve as a means of distancing herself from it. Stein discovers that the “opposite” of the mother goose might actually be true, that being known might not secure one’s identity but might actually cause it to be “lost completely lost.”

Others have interpreted this tension in “And Now” between embracing and resisting a common audience as both rhetorical for Stein and as intrinsic to the paradoxical mode of high modernism. Of the ongoing historical reassessment of canonical modernism’s relationship to the marketplace, Galow summarizes that “the last three decades have seen an explosion of volumes examining the various ways in which canonical authors, despite their occasionally dismissive rhetoric, have engaged with and been implicated in the marketplace” (315). Addressing “And Now,” as a kind of case study, Galow argues that its “trope of writer’s-block-overcome allows Stein to emphasize her status as an elite artist who has strong reservations about the literary marketplace while she is simultaneously writing pieces that will be marketed to a broad reading public” (325). Undergirding Galow’s argument are two crucial assumptions. The first is that to “overcome” writer’s block is to restore a former style of writing, in this case Stein’s and modernism’s pre-1930s high or “elite” aesthetic. The second is that content is secondary to form, an assumption that clearly supports high modernist affiliations. Thus, Stein’s deployment of rhetorical devices is perceived as outweighing any substantive expression of anxiety on her part.

But there is room in “And Now,” for another interpretation, one that, taking its first cue from the title, perceives sequential change in the place of contradiction. Before Stein concludes that her experience has been “just the opposite of I am I because my little dog knows me,” she describes a transformation: “It has always been completely included in myself my personality as any personality naturally is, and here all of a sudden, I was not just I because so many people did know me.” The phrase “all of a sudden” points to a dramatic change in Stein’s relationship to identity. While that relationship might have

been “natural” and common before, it is as such no longer. While it might be tempting — because Stein writes “And Now” in the past tense and because she has so obviously overcome her battle with writer’s block — to read Stein’s loss of identity as a struggle that has also been overcome, the title’s insistence on the unfinished present alongside this language of change suggests otherwise.

Another sign that a change has taken place in Stein’s thinking about identity comes in *Everybody’s Autobiography* (1937). Whereas Stein writes in “And Now” that “any personality naturally” is “completely included” within that person, here she again cites the mother goose, expresses her anxiety, but then asks “who has to be themselves inside them, not any one.” What seemed like a personal experience in “And Now” — the loss of identity — now seems like a more generic possibility for “any one.” When Stein returns to the nursery rhyme expression at the end of *Everybody’s Autobiography* it is to conclude that train of her thought as well as the text. I am I because my little dog knows me makes its final and most cited appearance in Stein’s closing sentiment “. . . perhaps I am not I even if my little dog knows me but anyway I like what I have and now it is today” (328). Far from recovering her sense of identity after the success of *Alice B. Toklas*, Stein indicates here an effort to come to terms with the loss.

In between “And Now” and these two reflective assessments of latter years stands Stein’s *A Geographical History of America, or the Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind* (1936), her most thorough meditation on the formative aspects of children’s narratives and “the question of identity” (401). The role of children’s narratives in *Geographical History* cannot be overstated because overstatement is so precisely the mode that Stein applies to them. Stein references the mother goose no fewer than 11

times. But this is only part of the children's narrative story in *Geographical History*. Though the problem of identity-as-recognition, as expressed in mother goose terms, has occupied Stein's writing since her lecture tour in 1934, in *Geographical History* that narrative comes to share the stage with the new narrative problem of boys evolving into men. The question "What is the use of being a little boy if one is growing up to be a man?" likewise appears no fewer than 14 times in the text. In the mode of overstatement, Stein proclaims, in one of these instances, that "One cannot say it too often and it need not bring tears to your eyes what is the use of being a little boy if you are going to grow up to be a man what is the use" (372). James R. Mellow, who characterizes the mother goose and the boys-to-men leitmotifs as "maddeningly repeated and rephrased" in *Geographical History*, may not be alone in disagreeing with Stein on this point. The problems of an identity fixed by recognition, on the one hand, or changing according to developmental norms, on the other, seem in the final version of *Geographical History* like two distinct, maybe even contrasting (maybe even "maddening") pieces of the elusive Steinian puzzle.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast, the draft manuscript of *Geographical History* may offer some clarity. Here these two identity problems appear to be not only far more prominent but also appear to be far more interrelated and entangled. One of the clearest expressions of the potential relationship between them was cut from the final version. In it Stein suggested

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Cooley argues that Stein's little dog and little boy discourses concern two different periods in the psychological history of identity. Pre-1865, Cooley explains that American psychology largely viewed the child mind as an adult in embryo. The characteristics of the adult are already present in the child but require cultivation. Identity in this model is predominantly fixed. Modern psychology, by contrast, begins to embrace the notion of development. In this model, the self is evolving and cumulative. Cooley rightly concludes that Stein rejects both of these narratives of education, but his rationale, that Stein rejects them because she prefers a model of youth, uncultivated and undeveloped, rests, I think, on some of Stein's earlier philosophies of youth, views which have changed rather sharply by the time she comes to deconstruct these two particular narratives from/of childhood.

that the problem of development had actually succeeded, in her mind, the problem of the mother goose: “I am I because my little dog knows me is not true. What is the use of being a little boy if you are growing to be a man. That is the secret of identity.”<sup>15</sup> What’s more, while the final version of *Geographical History* displays itself first and foremost as a treatise on the differences between human nature and the human mind, the manuscript version displays a more primary interest in the identities of dogs and children and the interaction between them.

The final published version of *Geographical History* begins with a series of observations. The first is that February is the month in which “were born Washington Lincoln and I.” The second is that everyone has to die in order to make “room” for those who have not lived. The third brings in the text’s subtitled theme “or The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind” by stating the first of a long line of distinctions that “Human nature cannot know” about the necessity of making room, “But the human mind can” (367). In other words, in its final version *Geographical History* begins with one of Stein’s favorite subjects: genius. George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Gertrude Stein are all geniuses. The category of the human mind will become the category of genius *sine qua non* in *Geographical History* in contrast to the ordinary, herd-like qualities of human nature. The first use of the phrase “What is the use of being a little boy if you are growing up to be a man” does not appear until a few pages in, in the first of many Chapter IIs. The first mention of little dogs comes a few pages still further in at the beginning of the second Chapter IV.

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<sup>15</sup> This appears 23 pages into the original manuscript held at the Beinecke Library.

But in the original manuscript of *Geographical History* the narratives of “little boy”s and “little dog”s actually precedes even the first reference to human nature and the human mind. The earlier version reads:

What is the use of being a little boy if you are going to grow up to be a man.

Use is here used in the sense of purpose.

But to begin with what man is man was man will be.

When children play tag they tag each other that is they touch each other to start, well dogs do that, a big dog with a little dog a white dog with a black dog a dog to a dog. That is what they do to begin to play. Any child does that.

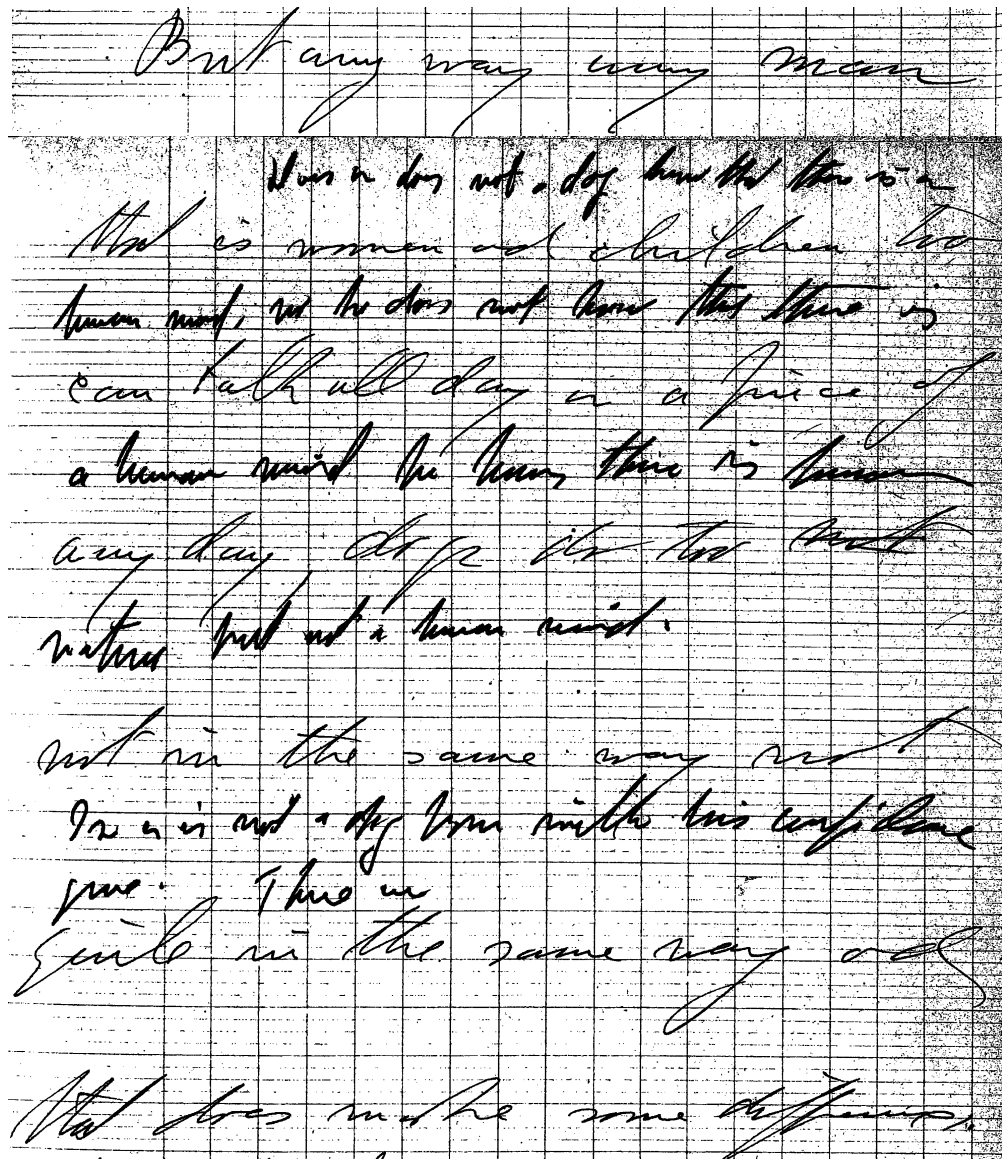
Collectively there is little in this version that does not also end up in the final.

Technically, all of the lines are used; but they are not used together, and they are not given the same pride of place. Reorganizing the manuscript such that the subtitled distinction between human nature and the human mind takes precedence over that between boys and dogs makes perfect rhetorical sense, akin to the most common revision in the writing process: that is, framing the thesis after-the-fact. What this change generally conceals — is designed to conceal — are the mental meanderings through which the thesis was first thought. And this is true even for Stein whose meditations seem (are designed to seem) like mental meanderings of the most unadulterated kind. In addition to acting as a textual precursor, it is possible that Stein’s thinking about boys and dogs also served as a theoretical precursor to the main claim about the relationship between human nature and the human mind that would come to take its place.

Then too, the separation of “What is the use of being a little boy” from the game of children and dogs playing tag, ultimately five chapters apart, disguises the work that has been done to achieve that separation. The problem of identity vis-à-vis dogs and



children is much messier in the original version. An excerpt from Stein's original manuscript illustrates the point:



But any way any man  
 does not know that there is a  
 that is women and children too  
 human mind, not he does not know that there is  
 can talk all day in a piece of  
 a human mind he knows there is human  
 any day does it too much  
 nature but not a human mind.  
 not in the same way not  
 is in and a dog know with his confidence  
 sure. There is  
 evil in the same way and  
 that does make some difference

Many who have studied Stein will recognize that such moments of intense revision are rare. First drafts were all too often also final copy. Such moments of narrative difficulty or doubt are consequently in Stein's case all the more meaningful. Here, because I cannot immediately read the page, I am impressed first by what the excerpt looks like as an image. This is probably the first and only time that I have been grateful for Stein's

notoriously bad hand-writing. As an image, the taking-turns quality of the lines is striking. I am reminded of William James's definition of double-consciousness as an alternation between first one and then another state of mind.<sup>16</sup> This page looks most distinctly as though it were of two minds. Even if this is an image of revision, it is of a particular kind. Even if the lighter set of lines were written first, as it seems likely they were, they have not been crossed out (and Stein did cross lines out) in order to be rewritten or replaced. Rather, they have been juxtaposed line-by-line. There is a choice to be made, it seems, but that choice has not yet been made. Here is an image of indecisiveness, ambivalence even. Here is an image of a text unable to move forward, a page unable to be turned. The bold, erratic text appears to do a kind of battle with the lighter, more regular penmanship with which it alternates its way down the page. Though it does not make its way into the final version, I am reminded when I see this image of Stein's own description of the "roughness and violence" of the work of art that refuses to be narrative.

Reading the text reveals that dog, child, human nature, and human mind have all been crowded onto this page. The text between the lines, in darker ink, reads: "Does or does not a dog know that there is a human mind, no he does not know that there is a human mind he knows there is human nature but not a human mind. Is or is not a dog born with his confidence gone. . ." The other set of lines records: "But any way any man that is women and children too can talk all day or any piece of any day dogs do too not in the same way not quite in the same way and that does make some difference . . ." In this moment the notions of human nature and the human mind do-si-do in such a way as to

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<sup>16</sup> William James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890) described the concept of double consciousness in a manner consistent with its psychological history as a pathological "mutation of the self," characterized by a "double" or "alternating personality" (379).

believe Stein's unequivocal claims that they have no relation to one another. Likewise, the concept of continuity between men, women, and children overlaps with the new marriage of human nature and dog in such a way as to underscore, for the second time, that Stein's thinking about these two concepts — of development and identity — was more integrated than the printed text lets on.

In *A Geographical History of America*, dogs are not just dogs and boys are not just boys. To resolve the problem of essential identity — of “I am I if my little dog knows me” — Stein shifts and dislocates that identity onto the dog. Basket, a figure in *Geographical History* and also the name of Stein's standard poodle, exemplifies for Stein more than just the complexity of canine consciousness, he also proves the possibility that identity might be insignificant after all and indeed that its loss may even be desirable.

Stein writes:

Identity is very curious.  
Not even the dogs can worry any further about identity.  
They would like to get lost and if they are lost what is there of identity.  
. . . They would like to get lost and so they would then be there where  
there is no identity, but a dog cannot get lost, therefore he does not have a human  
mind, he is never without time and identity.

The first assertion of this sequence “Identity is very curious” is, on the one hand, disproven by nearly every line that follows. There is nothing about identity to incite the curiosity of anyone or any dog. It is so not curious, so uninteresting, that “even the dogs” would like to “be there where there is no identity.” On the other hand, what is perhaps “curious” about this delineation of identity is Stein's insistence on sticking it (in both senses) to the dog. The dog is both the reluctant and compulsory heir to this hand-me-down of humanity. By displacing identity from herself on to the dog, Stein manages to equivocate the loss of identity, allowing it to be something that can at once be

“completely lost” and yet which also “cannot get lost.” In this way, it might be accurate to say that Stein gets to have her human nature and leave it too. She is distinct from her dog — as the human mind is distinct from human nature — and yet he is also her former self.

The problem of the nursery rhyme, “I am I because my little dog knows me,” increasingly comes into clarity in Stein’s writings of the thirties as more than just a problem of identity but much more precisely as the problem of a past identity internally contained and preserved. The little dog represents a past conception of identity that Stein would personally and culturally very much like to leave behind and in fact by identifying identity with the little dog Stein also and at once begins to negotiate this leave-taking. But the trajectory of Stein’s identity-critique is thickened by the introduction in *Geographical History* of another narrative from childhood, one whose center is the child. Stein has relied on the mother goose to do a great deal of heavy lifting for at least two years in her writing. The addition of the evolutionary question “What is the use of being a little boy if you are growing up to be a man” signals that one of the central concerns and critiques of Stein’s work of this period is not merely the idea of identity but the idea specifically of a former, historical self: the self of childhood.

Though Stein once believed in the idea of an internally “settle[d]” identity, what she termed in *The Making of Americans* “bottom nature,” the 1930s see her rejecting all of the dominant notions of identity available to her (qtd in Ashton 295). In examining Stein’s experimental 1938 play, *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, Sarah Bay-Cheng shows that the categories of boy and dog have become interchangeable as representatives of identity. Faustus wonders “if a boy is to grow up to be a man am I a boy am I a dog is

a dog a boy is a boy a dog and what am I I cannot cry what am I oh what am I” (qtd in Bay-Cheng 98). In the place of identity as “integrated” and “developing” Stein offers an image of humanity’s inability “either to comprehend itself or to evolve.” In the place of the “psycho-scientific certainty” about the principles of identity formation, Stein’s uncertainty about these principles are melodramatically bound toward deconstruction (89). There are many moments in the printed version of *Geographical History* where Stein’s meditations on mother goose and evolutionary narratives also read like melodramatic farce. Indeed among the genres embedded within it is a modernist melodramatic restaging of Stein’s identity crisis called “The question of identity: A Play.” The statement, repeated throughout *Geographical History*, that “human nature is no longer interesting” has a declarative appeal. And Stein’s “play” seems so playful with its disordered and repeated Acts and Scenes and with its self-referential absurdisms (The first of many “Scene II”s tells us that “Any scene may be scene two” (404)) that *Geographical History* can certainly be seen as quite literally performing the break between human nature and the human mind. Likewise, Stein’s repetitions of the nursery rhyme and the boys-to-men question can have a desensitizing effect. Stein emphasizes both that one apparently “cannot say” either of these expressions “too often” and also that doing so “need not bring tears to your eyes” (372). On the one hand, there is a glibness to Stein’s discourse on human nature; there is a sense in which its repeated dismissals come to seem nonchalant, easy, even fun. On the other, there is the emotionally-loaded suggestion, represented by tears, that the repetitions may not signal ease as much as they may underscore the struggle and the difficulty of this particular letting-go. In my view, taking the draft version into account goes a long way to suggest the latter of these

readings. The threat of nearly drowning — psychologically speaking — in the narratives of human nature and of childhood may take on a performative quality in the final version of *Geographical History* akin in many ways to melodramatic farce, but the weight of this revisionary moment suggests that the “play” of *Geographical History* is far from an empty performance.

Saying that human nature is no longer interesting inevitably brings tears to the eyes of the one saying it, or is necessarily said by “Tears.” In realizing that talking, for instance, is not a part of the human mind (because any person can talk and even any dog can talk), Stein writes, “I wish I could say that talking had to do with the human mind, I wish I could say so and not cry I wish I could” (375). Tears act as a sort of touchstone in *Geographical History*; they are what Stein gauges many of her conclusions by — even those which are apparently joyful. When, for instance, Stein experiences the “pleasure” of the “the human mind when it is altogether the human mind,” this too is measured in relation to tears or, in this case, to the absence thereof: “No this does not bring tears to anybody’s eyes not even to mine and I might I might cry easily oh so very easily” (374). Similarly, saying that there is no connection between the “little dog” and “I am I” requires an insistence on the way that it is said — “without tears” (405). Whether through this “thou doth protest too much” model of dry-eyed insistence or the alternative confessional of “as I say so tears come into my eyes” (373), the division of human nature from the human mind, of the little dog from its human owner, comes to seem like a visceral *tearing* of one from the other. The problem of Stein’s identity crisis in the face of mass recognition is one which she has resolved to answer by letting her lost identity be lost, but this resolution is neither cognitively nor emotionally simple.

The tears in *Geographical History* anticipate the tears of Rose, the child protagonist in Stein's first published work for children, *The World is Round*.<sup>17</sup> Rose was factually based on Rose d'Aiguy, the daughter of Robert and Dianne d'Aiguy, neighbors to Stein and Toklas in Bilignin, but her story, including the climactic moment when she inscribes "*Rose is a Rose is a Rose*" around the trunk of a tree, is largely that of Gertrude Stein (566).<sup>18</sup> Rose, like Stein, finds herself in recurrent thought. She "thinks" and then she "thinks again." And at the center of her thoughts is none other than the question of identity. Rose sings:

*Why am I a little girl  
Where am I a little girl  
When am I a little girl  
Which little girl am I* (538).

Rose wonders if there is anything essential to her that makes her like no other; she wonders if this is a function of her size; she wonders if it is a function of her gender. Through the interrogative catalogue — "Why," "Where," "When," and "Which" — she in effect answers her own questions, rhetorically demonstrating her conviction that both size/age and gender are products of circumstance. But the singing and the questions, as much as they challenge human nature, also illicit the response of human nature; Rose, like Stein, begins to cry, and when she cries, her dog cries too, and they both "cried and cried and cried" until "at last [Rose's] eyes were dried" (538-539).

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<sup>17</sup> The first version of *The World is Round* was "The Autobiography of Rose," composed in 1937. By the time Margaret Wise Brown, through Scott Publishers, wrote to Stein asking her if she would be interested in writing a book for children, Stein was fortuitously well underway on her manuscript of *World*. Though Scott Publishers sent similar requests to Hemingway and Steinbeck, only Stein wrote back with an enthusiastic yes. For a fuller account of this history see Leonard Marcus's biography of Margaret Wise Brown.

<sup>18</sup> Stein first wrote "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" in "Sacred Emily" in 1913, but the expression is popularized and indeed becomes emblematic of Stein and her style as the circular seal on the cover of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.

The connections between *Geographical History* and *The World is Round* are striking. Both, obviously, take geography as their central theme. Both feature children and dogs, and both are driven by the question of identity. Most importantly, Rose's journey in *The World is Round* to break through the naturalistic narratives that threaten to encircle and ensnare her — by climbing a linear mountain and sitting upon its peak triumphantly in her blue chair — is Stein's journey to leave the identifications of human nature behind for the fuller, more detached genius of the human mind.<sup>19</sup> Both even achieve this break in the same way — by writing in circles: "A Rose is a Rose is a Rose." Archival evidence also suggests that Stein may have begun drafting *The World is Round* at least in part as a response to readings of *Geographical History* if not also as a rethinking of that earlier text. In August 1938, Stein received a long essay by Julian Sawyer on "What The Geographical History of America Means to Me." Some of the lines that make it into *The World is Round* cover Sawyer's letter.<sup>20</sup>

Read as a successor to *Geographical History*, *The World is Round* suggests that here as there tears may serve as a metonym for drowning. The act of writing may likewise be, in both texts, the testimony of the "nearly drowned," the unique discourse of the no-longer-crying. As with Stein's children's narratives in general, the metaphorical, psychological quality of Stein's near-drowning experience in *Geographical History* — one marked by anxiety, by the hegemonic force of narrative, by the continual collapse of

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<sup>19</sup> Stein describes her passion for mountain hikes with some regularity throughout her career. It is also a common, heroic, genius, and saintly goal in her writings — as most famously expressed in *Four Saints in Three Acts* — to "be seated and not surrounded."

<sup>20</sup> These are draft lines that ultimately end up in chapter "3," "Eyes a Surprise." Stein writes in a circle around the white space of Sawyer's letter: "Rose sang as the rabbit ran/ And her song that began/ My/ What a sky/ And then the glass pen (Rose did have a glass pen)/ When oh say when/ Little glass pen/ say when will there not/ be that little rabbit/ When then pen/ And Rose burst into tears."



categories that refuse at last to be made distinct, and by tears — is retold in far more literalized fashion in *The World is Round*.

*The World is Round* tells the story first and foremost of Rose, trying to overcome or interrupt the knowledge of roundness that threatens to consume her, but it also tells the story of Willie. Willie is Rose's cousin (at least in the beginning) and her double in the sense that he has already accomplished the feat for which she is preparing. Willie we are told has nearly drowned twice in his life, and the result is that he no longer fears death. In the first instance, Willie gets tangled up in the "pretty" water-lilies of a lake. The adults, all remarkably unheroic in *The World is Round*, having "just finished eating," know that "you must never go into the water right after eating," so the rescue of Willie is left to a fellow child. That Willie should have drowned, that drowning is, in fact, the norm in a round world is illustrated in Stein's conclusion to the event — that "Willie was not drowned although the lake and the world were both all around." Survival is something of an anomaly in this scenario. And after the world's second failed attempt to drown Willie, this time with Rose in a car traveling up a hill, Willie is able to sing with confidence "*My name is Willie I am not like Rose/ I would be Willie whatever arose.*" Even more important, Willie is able to sing of the world being round in the past tense: "*Once upon a time the world was round the moon was round/ The lake was round/ And I I was almost drowned.*" That the roundness of the world is no longer a reality for Willie is emphasized by his ability to relegate it to the land of fairy tale and is seconded by his dream, not of himself drowning, but of "Round drowned" in his place (539-541).

Rose, on the other hand, is plagued by the recent knowledge that not only the world, but that everything, the sun, the moon, even the stars, is round and "that they [are]

all going around and around.” Rose begins to drown in roundness. She is taken over by a “dreadful” memory of having sung once in front of a mirror, and in her memory she too becomes round. Rose remembers that “as she sang her mouth was round and was going around and around” (543). The remainder of *The World is Round* tells the story of Rose’s battle with roundness. Rose’s weapons in this queer adventure are her voice, a blue chair, and most importantly her penknife. The holy grail of Rose’s journey is the top of a nearby mountain. By following the mountain’s linear ascension above the earth, Rose believes she can surmount the drowning effect and affect of the round world. In fact, I would argue that there is much in common between Rose’s trek up the mountain and the drowning swimmer’s experience of struggling to break, to capture, and then to hold the water’s surface.

In what is arguably the darkest section of Rose’s story, she faces an interminable night upon the mountain. Stein is not subtle about this point. She titles four chapters in the middle of Rose’s journey “Night.” As each chapter ends the reader, like Rose, no doubt hopes that this “Night” is over. But “Night” surrounds Rose, or Rose is unable to break through the darkness into day. In the middle of these interminable nights there is trauma, near-death, and there is water. In the chapter, “Rose Saw It Close,” which falls between two “Night”s, Stein writes: “What did Rose see close, that is what she never can tell and perhaps it is just as well, suppose she did tell oh dear oh dear what she saw when she fell. Poor dear Rose. She saw it close” (562). And in the following “Night,” Rose experiences yet another terror. She discovers a waterfall and is mistaken to think that she can take some shelter behind it, can escape within its even greater darkness the anxieties and also the unspeakable trauma of preceding nights. But on the wall behind the water,

written in triplicate Rose reads the words “*Devil, Devil, Devil*” (563). The effect of this encounter on Rose has the repetitive ring of trauma. Stein writes:

She decided she did not like water to fall, water fall water fall . . . So Rose and the blue chair went away from there she never could go down not there not ever again there, she could never go anywhere where water is falling and water does fall even out of a faucet, poor Rose dear Rose sweet Rose only Rose . . . So she went on climbing higher and higher and higher . . . If she did not she would think of seeing that, was the Devil round, was he around, around round, round around.  
(564)

The elements of drowning are all present in this scene — water, darkness, depth, and a near-death encounter. It is also worth remembering that this is not Rose’s first terrifying experience with a wall of water on a mountain. One of Willie’s and Rose’s earlier near drowning experiences takes place while they are riding up a mountain in a car with Willie’s parents. Suddenly, Stein writes, “the rain came down with a will, you know how it comes when it comes so heavy and fast it is not wet it is a wall that is all” (540). Before somebody manages to open a door, the car fills with water, enough “to drown Willie certainly to drown Willie and perhaps to drown Rose” (540). What is different about this subsequent near-drowning experience for Rose is its psychological quality. Rose is alone, and the feeling of drowning described here seems as much the product of remembering that earlier almost-drowning as of experiencing it again in the flesh. Here the elements of that prior sequence are repeated, but they appear in a dissociated, fragmented way. The darkness, the depth, the water, and the fear of death are spatially disentangled. Each is physically distinct such that their congruence for Rose presents a powerful allegorical experience of drowning felt on a number of physical and psychological levels. Most powerfully, the circular effect of Rose’s memories as of her encounter of several nights

without a day renders this experience of drowning not just traumatic but post-traumatic as another experience of drowning in a life, a childhood, defined by such experiences.

Rose's ascent, Dante-esque, out of the crucible of childhood requires the shedding of one skin for another. That the "conclusion" to *The World is Round* is one of the most atypical typical endings in a children's book is attested to by the diverse critical responses to it. Many scholars would have preferred, it seems, for Rose's tree poetry climax to double as the story's ending. Many use the positive climatic affect of this scene as a lens through which to read the far more ambiguous, last chapter, which relates the marriage of Rose and Willie. Aptly titled "The End," Stein writes: "Willie and Rose turned out not to be cousins, just how nobody knows, and so they married and had children . . . and they lived happily ever after and the world just went on being round" (574). Edith Thacher Hurd synthesizes these two endings as parallels to the stages of Stein's own life of circular writing and nonnormative marriage (160-161). Jan Susina too follows the optimistic tone of Rose's writing accomplishment along with its repetitive structure as a guide to reading the whole of *World*, arguing that continuity is a positive quality in the story and that the repetitions of the story and the marriage at the end are attempts to provide child readers with a sense of stability and security (118-119).

Barbara Will's more recent reading of *The World is Round* likewise evinces a strong preference for the early Rose of the story but differs sharply in that it rejects Stein's own declaration for a happy ending in the marriage of Rose and Willie. Rather, Will reads the ending of *The World is Round* as a betrayal of Rose and of Stein's earlier, anti-patriarchal experimental writing. Will's condemnation of this ending is as sweeping as it is harsh. She compares Rose's submission to the patriarch, Willie (with his "phallic

searchlight”), to Stein’s (alleged) allegiance to Pétain (““And Then”” 345).<sup>21</sup> And she links the representations of children (as “submissive, masochistic victims”) in *The World is Round* and in all Stein’s children’s literature to Stein’s own child identifications and (alleged) masochistic relationship with Alice Toklas (342-343). Barbara Will’s work is important because it is one of the few that reads across Stein’s children’s and adult literature during the World War II era, but it is also the most troubling to me not only because it assumes much about Stein’s personal life and politics and then assumes a congruence between that life and her work but also because it relies heavily on a binary hermeneutic frame in which children must be either heroic agents or masochistic victims and in which Stein must either be a feminist or a collaborationist.

Linda Watts has surmised one of the pitfalls of these types of readings of *The World is Round* when she observes that many critics’ purported summaries of the story “betray conventional (rather than experimental) readings” (55). Each of these readings seem inclined to take Stein’s “happily ever after” at face-value as a representation of Stein’s narrative intent. This is despite the fact that the story is filled with meta-narrative gestures that point to itself not as a fairy tale but as a mock-fairy tale.<sup>22</sup> From start to finish, *The World is Round* is too conspicuously framed as a fairy tale for children. The happy ever after ending falls in a chapter parodically titled “The End.” And the “Once

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<sup>21</sup> Will has recently written a book length study of Stein’s relationship with Bernard Faÿ and her wartime politics in which she argues, in part, that “there is little doubt that Stein’s support for Pétain was authentic” (*Unlike Collaboration* 143). But Stein herself introduces doubt on this subject in *Wars I Have Seen* when she writes: “And then there was Pétain. So many points of view about him, so very many. I had lots of them, I was almost French in having so many” (82). To support these many views Stein will later give Pétain credit for saving France (92), but she will also compare his desire for an ordered state to “the point of view of a crazy man at the end of the last war in 1918...” (81).

<sup>22</sup> We may even call *World* a revisionist fairy tale in the feminist sense. In conflating the conventional ending of a children’s fairy tale with the conventional ending of the domestic novel, it is not only possible, but likely, that Stein is enacting a double parody of each of these genres. Though I have focused on the children’s narrative aspect of *World*’s parodic efforts, there is more to be said about *World*’s subversive potential. Linda Watts’ reading of *World*, in fact, marks one of the first significant efforts to identify the gender-transgressive aspects of Stein’s children’s literature.

upon a time” beginning actually runs like a loop throughout the story. In fact the frame, which is itself broken, is the most that this story has in common with the conventional utopianism of the fairy or wonder tale of Stein’s era.<sup>23</sup> Reaching this “happily ever after” has required some pretty dramatic genre and plot changes not only because Rose’s story has been anything but happy but also because this is most clearly not the conventional ending of a children’s story, but rather the very conventional ending of another genre altogether — the nineteenth-century domestic novel. In a matter of pages the narrative of *The World is Round* ages up and so does Rose. Not only is the blood bond between Rose and Willie inexplicably severed, but Rose appears by the time she reaches the top of the mountain to have added years, not days to her life.

The actual last words of *The World is Round* are “they lived happily ever after and the world just went on being round.” Indeed, the world is probably the only thing that has not changed in this ending. Rose and Willie are different people. This is a different genre. As readers we might be tempted to pass the book to a different reader when we reach this point in the story since the intended audience may too have changed. In contrast to Willie who can imagine early on in *The World is Round* surviving the drowning experience by drowning “round” in his place, Stein does not entertain this possibility. Drowning is the norm in Stein’s round world. And what drowns in this case is childhood. *The World is Round* is an experimental, subversive children’s narrative, but many critics have crucially overlooked that among the conventions Stein is most set on subverting in this text are the heroic fantasies and fairy tales about childhood. There is an interesting intentional Freudian slip early in *The World is Round* that has greater meaning

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<sup>23</sup> Jack Zipes writes that a nearly universal purpose of the modern fairy tale is “to provide hope in a world seemingly on the brink of catastrophe” (1). The “once upon a time” of the fairy tale, he goes on to say, “keeps alive our utopian longings for a better world that can be created out of our dreams and actions” (79).

in hindsight. Willie, like Rose, feels as though he is drowning in a round world. Stein writes: “The world got rounder and rounder./ The stars got rounder and rounder/ The moon got rounder and rounder/ The sun got rounder and rounder/ And Willie oh Willie was ready to drown her, not Rose dear me not Rose but his sorrows” (545). Willie does not drown Rose, presumably does not intend to drown her, but by letting the suggestion of that intention stand (and Stein does more than this by making sure the reader does in fact catch that the “her” could be, and naturally would be, read as Rose), Stein perhaps foreshadows the real and metaphorical drownings to come. By the time Rose reaches the top of the mountain she is a child no more. Childhood is what she has, perhaps thankfully, left behind her.

In 1934, when Stein returned to her Oakland, California home, she was shocked and disillusioned to find that the present-day sight bore no likeness to the image she had preserved in her mind’s eye:

. . . the house the big house and the big garden and the eucalyptus trees and the rose hedge naturally were not any longer existing, what was the use, if I had been I then my little dog would know me but if I had not been I then that place would not be the place that I could see, I did not like the feeling . . . If I remember what I remember then why do I remember that. I did remember that but it did look like that and so I did not remember that and if it did not look like that then I did not remember that. What was the use. (300)

Confronted with an unrecognizable past, Stein relies on the nursery rhyme’s story to convey her own. In the poem, titled “The Old Woman and the Pedlar,” it is an ordinary “market-day” when the “old woman” heads in to town. After selling her wares, she begins the walk home only to fall asleep en route by the side of the road. Asleep, the woman ends up becoming herself an object of theft. A pedlar steals upon her and commences, in the words of the rhyme, to “cut her petticoats all round about . . . up to the

knees.” When the woman awakes, she “shiver[s]” and “shake[s],” words that suggest a visceral reaction to the cold as well as an emotional response to the assault (potentially sexual) on her person. What follows, in the mother goose, as for Stein, is an identity crisis. The woman in the poem does not recognize herself much as Stein does not recognize her childhood home. The former determines that her canine companion can be a trusted judge in the matter. If she is still herself, then her little dog will know her. That he does not know her, that he sounds the alarm upon her approach, implies far more than it says — that some tragic transformation, more drastic than the mere cutting of cloth, has taken place. For Stein too the “naturally” no “longer existing” surface elements of home — of “rose hedge” and trees — seem to signify more than meets the eye. That these manifest changes may be suggestive of latent transformations, that home might not be home any longer, and indeed the sheer uncertainty of knowing whether one’s memory of home was ever connected to anything actually existing, leads Stein to ask a most depressive question: “what is the use”?

Memory is notoriously unreliable in the postmodernist context, but for Stein in the 1930s, this realization strikes an epiphanic chord. Like many nostalgics, mother goose’s protagonist has a traumatic experience away from home and hopes, like all nostalgics, that the return home will serve as a cure. That the return home fails to provide comfort in this case makes this recollection for Stein all the more apt. As with the old woman, the return home, which is also for Stein a return to childhood, becomes a gateway, ironically, to heightened anxiety. Stein attempts the application of the old mantra “if I had been I then my little dog would know me but if I had not been I then that place would not be the place that I could see . . .” and reports as the result that she does



“not like the feeling.” As with the old woman whose dog “began to bark” and “so she began to cry, ‘Lauk a mercy on me, this is none of I!’” Stein’s inability to match the home of her present perception with the image preserved in her mind makes her question the validity as well as the utility of anything internalized through memory, including one’s own sense of being. Elsewhere in *Everybody’s Autobiography*, Stein makes the point succinctly: “And identity is funny being yourself is funny as you are never yourself to yourself except as you remember yourself and then of course you do not believe yourself . . . why should you, you know so well so very well that it is not yourself” (70).

Nostalgia, in its pathological and normative forms, conveys the desire for and belief in the restorative powers of an originary past. The homesick soldier and the modern adult are rehabilitated by the space and time of childhood. Interestingly, contemporary scholars of the nostalgic condition almost universally convey an opposite belief — that such a return is not only impossible but that the very idea of a return is a sign without a referent. According to Hemmings, “Children’s books from the golden age are nostalgic also in their conspicuous construction of childhood as a personal golden age, rich in retrospective longing for a past not as it was, but as it might only have been” (57). Aaron Santesso likewise illuminates the idea of an idyllic past is one that draws less on personal, lived experience than on representations of the past, imaginative and aesthetic. Nostalgia, Santesso explains, “is not a desire for the past per se . . . rather, it is a longing for objects that are idealized, impersonal, and unattainable. A work may look to the past; it is only truly nostalgic if that past is idealized” (16). Though nostalgia may have begun as a medical idea, Santesso argues that it “matured as a literary device” (15). The poets of the eighteenth century had as much if not more to contribute to imagining

and defining this most imaginative of modern conditions. It is worth recalling that Stein turns to fictional narratives — to mother goose — to tell the story of her own childhood and of her own experience of failed homecoming. An important aspect of Santesso's and Hemmings', among many others', study of nostalgia centers on its mediation through literature. What these scholars show, and what Stein's own reflections support, is the extent to which literature serves a primary, not secondary, role for the experience of this most modern of psychological conditions.

For Stein, the child within is not simply a past self, lost or inaccessible, it also almost certainly a fictitious self, impossible to be felt, incapable of being believed. Identity is neither “funny” in the humorous sense nor is it simply strange, rather it is ironically unreal, a farce, a joke. It is symbolically significant that when Stein returns to Oakland she remembers not (or not just) her childhood, but she writes that she straightaway “remembered the Mother Goose.” The mother goose stands in for her childhood and for her home as only a fictional narrative can. In mapping the story of her past self to the template of children's narrative, Stein suggests that these stories are analogous in substance as well as form. In other words, the child within may well be a children's narrative; that is, it may be a fairy tale or fantasy perspective of the past and of the self, nostalgically reified as the purest, most authentic version of both.

### **Politics in and out of Stein's Late Modernism:**

In describing identity (and most everything else) as “funny,” Stein utilizes a child-like language to illustrate her concerns about childhood, memory, and children's narratives, but this language should not be mistaken for anything like a lack of seriousness about these issues. When Stein travels from America to France for the second

and last time in her life, she “worrie[s]” about her relationship to identity, to “the Mother Goose,” and to country:

To get this trouble out of my system I began to write the Geographical History of America or the Relation of Human Nature To The Human Mind and I meditated as I had not done for a very long time not since I was a little one about the contradiction of being on this earth with the space limiting and knowing about the stars in an unlimited space that is that nobody could find out if it was limiting or limited, and now these meditations did not frighten me as they did when I was young, so that was that much done. (*EA* 306-307)

For some the subjects of politics and childhood may make for strange bedfellows, but for Stein they are importantly intertwined. She slips seamlessly from questions about identity to questions about the national landscape. *Geographical History*’s proper, long title says as much by positing as its initial subject the “Geographical History of America” and then offering to rename it (with the crucial conjunctive “or”) “the Relation of Human Nature To The Human Mind.” National interiors become psychological interiors and vice versa. The goal of *Geographical History*, Stein writes, is “to get this trouble out of my system.” The movement she emphasizes is from the inside out. The “trouble” goes by a variety of names including identity, and Mother Goose, and America, but altogether these are the lessons and the homes (local and national) internalized in childhood. National and personal identity, geography and psychology, meet for Stein in this vision of her former, American-child self. The realization that she is no longer, now an American grown-up in France, “frighten[ed]” as she was when she “was a little one” marks a point of accomplishment for Stein. She remarks, “so that was that much done.”

Beyond *Geographical History*, the meditation named, this passage strongly anticipates *The World is Round* of the following year, a book that takes up the childhood meditation on the problem of the round world far more centrally. In fact *The World is*

*Round* does much more work on the national anti-nostalgic front than does *Geographical History*. Though *The World is Round* has received little treatment as a political text, Stein, it seems, was intent on marketing it as such. In the fall of 1939, Scott Publishers proposed a second American lecture tour to Stein in order to promote the release of the children's book.<sup>24</sup> The second lecture tour never materialized, but Stein was enthusiastic about its prospects and began to think about a new series of lectures befitting the task. In an undated draft letter to John McCullough Stein proposes a series of titles for this new lecture series. The very first title on this list is especially intriguing "The World as a novel or Meditations about government." Here Stein reproduces the double-title structure of *A Geographical History of America or the Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind* in order to insist on another equally strange, equally ironic analogy. In this case, the lecture title implicitly rejects the place of *The World is Round* as mere children's book and claims shelf space for that title among the works of public policy, history, and political science. The second title on this proposed list, "The World is Round for children and grown ups, two different lectures depending upon the audience," underscores the generic complexity that Stein imagined for this text. Indeed, a further proposed lecture title, "An American in France," contributes to the overall sense that Stein hoped to promote *The World is Round* as a children's text with a substantial national, political, and grown-up subtext.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> On October 9, 1939 John McCullough, editor for Scott Publishers, sent Stein a letter in which he reports that he has consulted with Carl Van Vechten about "your tour" and goes on to list 10 "business possibilities" relating to the second tour.

<sup>25</sup> This letter may have been written in response to John McCullough's October 9, 1939 letter cited above. Specifically, it may have been intended as a response to number eight on McCullough's list of ideas and questions regarding the tour. Number eight read: "I have asked various people on what subjects they would like to hear you lecture, and enclose the list, which might help you with your ideas: a. Children and children's books. b. Picasso and art . . . c. Writing. d. Several thought that your views on Shakespeare or critical lectures on other writers classic and modern would be very exciting. e. Many people would like to

In addition to being semi-autobiographical, Rose's journey up the mountain in *The World is Round* may also be more than a little allegorical. The text's numerous allusions to Dante — from Rose's Devil-encounter to her mountain pilgrimage — certainly invite this comparison. When considered a part of the sequence of texts (I won't call it a trilogy) beginning with *Geographical History* and continuing through *Paris France*, the journey of Rose in *The World is Round* is suggestively framed as the center of an autobiographical and allegorical journey undertaken by Stein away from the geographies, memories, and ideologies of America toward those embraced and personified, from Stein's point of view, by France. Set in France, based in large measure on Stein's 10 year old French neighbor Rose D'Aiguy, with a nod as well to Francis Rose, the French painter and friend Stein chose to illustrate *World* but who was ousted by Scott publishers in favor of Clement Hurd, *The World is Round* was crafted as a very French book.<sup>26</sup> Even more to the point, it was crafted as a very French book for an American audience since *World* was solicited by an American publisher for publication in America.

*World's* French bias is more understated in the actual content of the story, but Rose's decision to recognize and to work with, not against the round world, by writing cyclically and in full circle "*Rose is a Rose is a Rose*" around the trunk of a tree, aligns her, however subtly, with Stein's vision of France and distances her even more

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hear you comment on the European situation. f. If I could work out a lecture for the Metropolitan Opera Guild or in music schools on words and music, would it interest you? . . ." Stein's lecture ideas, including others titled "Music and large and small countries and civil wars" and "Why I still like painting," appear to address specific items from this earlier request. Both letters are found in YCAL MSS 76, Box 131, Folder 2861.

<sup>26</sup> It did not take long for Stein to become fond of Hurd's illustrations as well. She was especially excited by the possibility that some of his illustrations were to be used on rugs and wallpaper to promote the book. For an excellent, behind-the-scenes account of *World's* publication see Edith Thacher Hurd's Afterword, "The World is Not Flat," in the North Point Press printing of *The World is Round*.

importantly from the American point of view. In *Paris France*, which Stein wrote in the year after *The World is Round* and which also began as a children's narrative (and may have remained one in Stein's view), the French, Stein writes, know that the world is round.<sup>27</sup> They know that the world is round, and they are attached to the earth, a set of claims which Stein uses to emphasize French realism. "[T]he French do not make much lyrical poetry," Stein writes; "they do not get away from the earth enough to look at it, they paint it, but they do not poeticize it" (62). In contrast to the French, in contrast to Rose in *World*, Stein wonders in *Paris France*: "Is it possible that America does not know that the world is round." In *Geographical History* Stein praised America for the flatness of its geography: "only flat land a great deal of flat land is connected with the human mind and so America is connected with the human mind" (388). And in *Everybody's Autobiography* of the following year she likewise compared the Midwestern landscape, as seen from her airplane window, to a cubist painting (198). In each of these instances Stein linked the geographical flatness of America's landscape to the human mind and to the genius of modernist art. Stein's attitude toward American flatness changes radically and in short order through *World* and into *Paris France*. The phony war intervenes, and now Stein wonders critically if America does not know that the world is round "because there is no threat of war" in America as there is in Europe (44-45). Wars for Stein are important temporal forces that have the effect of catching societies up to the present moment. Stein observes that wars "only make anybody know what has

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<sup>27</sup> Stein appears to compare much of her late wartime writing to children's narratives and children's poetry in "A Transatlantic Interview." Sometimes these comparisons are ambiguous as when she says that "I became more and more interested in the subject of narration . . . and the bulk of my work since then, has been largely narration, and I had done children's stories. I think *Paris, France* and *Wars I have Seen* are the most successful of this" (19). Here it is unclear if Stein is referencing "narration" or "children's stories," but it is tempting to read into, even the confusion between the two. Later, she makes a clearer comparison when she says that most of her recent poetry has been children's poetry and then remarks that "in Paris, France there is quite a bit of it, but that is mainly dealing with children" (23).

already happened it has happened already the war only makes it public makes those who like illustrations of anything see that it has been happening” (*EA* 76). Reading between the lines, it is evident that the threat of war has affected Stein deeply. Her claim that it has not affected her home nation, whether true or not, speaks to her sense of a widening gap between them.

For Stein, who has always prided herself on living in the present moment, it is possible that America, without the threat of war, belongs to a past century. But this new antiquated image of America is, in another sense, a logical extension of her work in *Everybody's Autobiography* and in *Geographical History* “to get this trouble out of my system.” Stein has been working for some time to align America with her past — autobiographically and cognitively. Now America belongs to the past atavistically as well. And in this way America has become even more analogously linked in Stein’s writing and thinking to childhood; neither has learned that the world is round; both embody the past. If Stein’s second American lecture tour had materialized, it is not very difficult to imagine just how different it might have been from the first. Stein’s disenchantment with America, which had only begun near the end of her first tour, had reached its peak by the time she had finished *The World is Round*, was beginning *Paris France*, and was planning the second tour in the fall of 1939. If Stein indeed felt that America needed a closer proximity to war in order to be brought out of a lyrical, mother goose past, it is possible that she viewed the second lecture tour and the wartime children’s narratives it was designed to promote as vehicles to bring the war to America and to American children.

This is an argument that calls upon a synthesized, intertextual reading of children's narrativity throughout Stein's war-time writings — regardless of shelf-genre — and it is an argument that can only surface by taking the violence in these narratives seriously. By and large when post-modernist scholars have noted the child-like language in Stein's late modernist writings these observations have lent support to the view that Stein failed to take the atrocities of the second world war seriously, that her literature evinces a tendency toward escapism and fantasy, and worse that it highlights hers as a politics of collaboration. To write about Stein's second world war literature is to respond to a paradox: that Stein herself a Jew and a lesbian, stayed in France (despite ample opportunity to leave for America), lived in the midst of the German occupation, and nonetheless survived and apparently survived without great or even terribly minor suffering. Stein and Toklas we now know owed their lives and livelihoods to Bernard Faÿ, a long-time friend who negotiated their safety with the Vichy leader, Maréchal Pétain. In the absence of strong evidence to the contrary, Stein's lasting friendship with Bernard Faÿ has had the effect of confounding Stein's wartime views, which are mostly ambiguous, with Faÿ's unquestionable sympathies with the German Nazi movement.<sup>28</sup>

Even writers who seem to want to read Stein's World War II writings the way others of Stein's works are read, without the need for moral judgment, nonetheless cave at some point in the process and acknowledge somewhere along the line, that Stein's

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<sup>28</sup> Barbara Will's *Unlikely Collaboration* is the most extensive effort correlating Stein's with Faÿ's politics. Janet Malcolm's *Two Lives* offers a slightly different perspective. While Malcolm uncovers even more abundant evidence for Faÿ's crimes during the war, she appears to agree with Edward Burns that it was unlikely that Stein or Toklas knew about Faÿ's role (99-100). Malcolm also provides a key example of just how easy it is to mis-read Stein's ambiguous intentions in the wartime context. The case involves an orphan Jewish child, whose adoption — it was initially reported — Stein opposed. But more evidence has uncovered not only that the safety of this child was not in danger but that what Stein opposed was the particular adults who wished to adopt the child. She felt that a Jewish child needed to be adopted by a Jewish family (185-190).



politics, if not her writing, were irresponsible and worse. What I find especially problematic in many of these arguments is the degree to which the children's narrativity of Stein's wartime texts seems to become the clear and obvious target for this kind of moral qualification. Stein's lack of seriousness about the war goes hand-in-hand in too many of these accounts with the seemingly obvious lack of seriousness of narratives for children.

Early on, Stein's fellow modernists and modernist critics may have helped to set the definitive tone about her work of this period. When asked to review two children's books of 1939 — Gertrude Stein's *The World is Round* and T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* — Edmund Wilson passed on the task but not before publishing a prefatory piece to express his “baffle[ment]” at the assignment and not before publishing his non-review view that he “had difficulty getting through Stein's book.” Worse, Wilson goes on to disparage and dismiss the larger modernist trend of writing for children. Observing that many modernists have published recent children's books, including Stein, Eliot, Kay Boyle and E.E. Cummings, Wilson expresses his dismay: “I don't know what this means—except that they evidently do not feel at the moment that they have anything better to do” (qtd. in Curnutt, *Critical Response* 115). Despite being the editor for this collection of critical responses to Stein's work, Kirk Curnutt, suggests a more muted, but still kindred reaction to the overflow of childhood narratives and language into Stein's adult literature of the thirties. To bolster his argument that Stein's expressions of writer's block and of her “anxieties toward celebrity” (“Inside and Outside” 296), following the success of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, are more rhetorical than serious, Curnutt opens his essay by citing the “nursery doggerel” in *Geographical History*.

Though references to this child language and even to *Geographical History* are almost nonexistent elsewhere in the essay, beginning with them sets Curnutt's case before the reader in the manner of a seemingly obvious case-in-point. To express anxiety in the terms of a nursery rhyme apparently proves, full stop, that that anxiety is not to be taken seriously.

In line with scholars like Curnutt and Galow who have argued that Stein's 1930s anxiety was a mere rhetorical flourish — a feeling not to be taken seriously — or with the critic, Wilson, who assessed that she must have had nothing better to do, readers of Stein's wartime writing have used the features of childhood and children's narrative embedded within them as evidence of Stein's immoral lack of seriousness in the face of an imminent or ongoing catastrophic violence. Even many of those critics who set out to be less moralizing and less judgmental about Stein's wartime emphasis on "daily living" apparently cannot find a way to excuse the interjections of childhood into these texts. Lesinska's recent assessment of the child-adult hybrid *Paris France* (1940), a text which has received remarkably little critical attention, is worth discussing at length. "At first glance," she writes, the text "seems to be offensively trivial" (324). And Lesinska quotes the opening paragraph which reads as follows:

PARIS, FRANCE is exciting and peaceful.

I was only four years old when I was first in Paris and talked French there and was photographed there and went to school there, and ate soup for early breakfast, and had leg of mutton and spinach for lunch, I always liked spinach, and a black cat jumped on my mother's back. That was more exciting than peaceful. I do not mind cats but I do not like them to jump on my back. (1)

Lesinska's set up to this passage, that "at first glance" the text "seems to be offensively trivial," leads the reader to expect a second, deeper, and alternative look. But for Lesinska, and others, the deeper conclusion to be drawn is not that the passage is not

trivial but that such “political escapism” was common in “those days” (325). Similarly, Olson who seeks to rehabilitate Stein’s wartime habits as a more radical representation of pleasure during war, hits a wall when it comes to the child elements of Stein’s wartime novel, *Mrs. Reynolds*. In this case, Olson argues that “the nursery rhyming of Stein’s style works against the acknowledgement of any real threat” (109) and concludes that “Stein’s celebration of the Reynoldses’ habits identifies a dangerous kind of self-absorption.” Ultimately, Olson echoes Lesinska and others that Stein’s wartime writing “illuminates an extremely problematic escapism” (113).

Part of what sets readers off in Stein’s wartime writings, as Whittier-Ferguson has observed, is their way of vacillating between two voices, two different registers of writing. Whereas in one moment Stein can seem to be writing in a “referential” mode that is engaged with the concrete circumstances of the occupation and the war, in the next her writing can take an “anti-referential” turn that makes her seem detached from these same material realities. Though Whittier-Ferguson does not stress the point, implicitly it is not just any anti-referential voice but Stein’s particular “infantile narrative voice,” as Lesinska terms it, that piques readers’ frustration (324). Take, for example, another passage from *Paris France* where Stein introduces a description of the French order for mobilization by noting just how much she “like[s] words of one syllable.” The order, referencing “the army de terre, de mer et de l’air,” she continues “works out well” and “is very impressive when you read it in every village” (65). As Whittier-Ferguson rightly points out, this reading “‘works out well’ if one reads this proclamation of nationwide conscription purely as a collection of words on a government notice . . . Here, as is so often the case, Stein courts furious accusations from readers who are more directly caught

up either in the machinery of war itself or who will resent as unpatriotic this aesthetic attention to words instead of a more direct embrace of their stirring reference to battle” (409-410). Similarly, for Lesinska “the dissonance between the gravity of the political situation during the phony war of 1939-1940 . . . and the rather lighthearted tone of the narrative voice” is understandably unsettling to readers for whom the latter voice must seem “intolerably superficial” despite Lesinska’s own correction that the narrator of *Paris France* may not be Stein herself and may even be an unreliable narrator (324).

Where I differ with both of these important revisionary readings of Stein is in the presumption that Stein’s language in these moments is either “lighthearted” or “anti-referential.” To be sure, in the conscription passage cited above Stein’s language is child-inflected in its appreciation for words of one syllable as well as in its appreciation for rhyme — “terre” “mer” and “air,” but in what immediately follows this description Stein suggests that she has grasped something, through this seemingly simplistic and superficial observation, that is in fact profound. What Stein notes is that these orders will be effective because they are posted in a nation and in a time that longs for organization, so much so that ordinary individuals, adults no less, are quite willing to take the place of the conventional child and let the government take authority out of their hands — to order and to organize them. The very next paragraph reads: “It could be a puzzle why the intellectuals in every country are always wanting a form of government which would inevitably treat them badly” (65). In other words, it is possible to read the role of children’s narratives — brought to the fore so conspicuously by Stein herself — as a challenge to uncritical thinking. Stein may appreciate, like the child of convention, words

of one syllable, but she is not taken in, like this same child-construct, by their propagandist, patriotic, and reductively simple display.

Where so much of the scholarly criticism around Stein's thirties expressions of anxiety have sought to minimize them as the rhetorical tropes of modernist celebrity culture, so much of the scholarly criticism around Stein's forties wartime literature has worried about the lack of such expressions, has wondered about the moral implications of a wartime literature — particularly during the second world war — that does not display as outwardly as possible the tragic sympathies required for such a tragic time in our global history. Thus, where readers of Stein's thirties literature, following *Alice B. Toklas*, seem to feel that Stein's anxiety is over, expressed to the point of insincerity, readers of her forties literature feel that there is hardly enough anxiety to go around. But there may not be as wide a gulf between these two sets of readings as might at first seem to be the case. Rather, each appears to be reacting, in part, to the same sorts of child identifications, narratives, and expressions within Stein's work. Where in the former decade such expressions lend themselves to interpretations of superficial play, in the latter they produce a far deeper sensation of insult. In both cases, the language of children's narratives suggests a lack of seriousness — ranging, respectively, from the rhetorical to the immoral.

What many of these arguments miss is that the lack of serious maturity is precisely the mentality that Stein is working, through children's narrations, to parody. Though many scholars have noted Stein's affinities for childhood, few have noted her serious political view that children should have the right to vote ("Transatlantic Interview" 16-17). Few likewise have noted that her late criticism of America and her

condemnation of Germany rest alike on her perception of these nations as embodying the very childhood mentality that she had come to reject as a fiction of mother goose proportions. Stein describes how her meditations on the problem of feeling and remembering the past (which is also the inner) self lead her to question the role and purpose of childhood — “what is the use of being a little boy if you are to be a man” — and moreover lead her “to meditate more . . . on the subject of history and newspapers and politics” (306-307). On the heels of *Geographical History* and *The World is Round*, Stein concludes that the question “what is the use of being a boy if you are growing up to be a man” is a national problem for countries like America that continue to place enormous cultural stock into ideologies of youth. The French have resolved the question and the problem, Stein writes, by collapsing the boy into the man. Just two years after *Geographical History*, Stein reflects in *Paris France*, “I once wrote and said what is the use of being a boy if you are to grow up to be a man what is the use and what is the use” as if these questions have been placed utterly behind her. And they have been placed there by her subsequent realization that “in France a boy is a man of his age the age he is and so there is no question of a boy growing up to be a man and what is the use” because “a Frenchman is always a man” (26-27).

Stein expands upon this dichotomy between America and France in her wartime essays where she contrasts America’s “facile optimism” with France’s “phoenix” mentality. With more than a hint of disparagement, Stein hones in on the American industrial era “between Roosevelt and Roosevelt” and characterizes it as a period and a people forebodingly shaped by “easy wars, easy victories, easy success, easy money, easy eating and easy drinking and easy madly running around and easy publicity, easy

everything” (“The New Hope” 142-143). In this essay, which Stein calls, “The New Hope in Our ‘Sad Young Men,’” the young men of the first world war era are “sad” because for them “life began early” and “success was great.” After 30, Stein asks, “what was there to do”? Then answers, “nothing.” For these young men, for this “lost generation” as Stein also calls them in this essay, “life was finished by 30” (142). The French, in clear contrast, are distinguished for Stein because they do not “like that life is too easy.” Rather, “they like, like the phoenix, to rise from the ashes. They really do believe that those that win lose” (“The Winner Loses” 129).

This last reference to “those that win” clearly alludes to America whose “easy success[es],” Stein believes, have set the stage for an entire “lost generation.” But it also points the finger at Germany. In fact the essay “The Winner Loses” is explicitly about the German occupation of France. This essay never pronounces outright that the “winner” who will “lose” is Germany, a fact that is understandable given its 1940 publication date. Rather, Stein focuses on France as Germany’s alter-ego, as the loser who will win. In talking with the young men around Bilgnin, Stein finds that they are “very pleased” with the armistice, choosing to view the occupation as an interim of suffering, a period of oppression necessary to endure, in a long battle for French liberty. The young Frenchmen seem to have embraced the Nietzschean sentiment, “that which does not kill us makes us stronger.” Stein paraphrases their sentiment that “if they had had an easy victory,” the vices of weakness these youth feel they had begun to indulge in peacetime “would have been weaker.” The war, they actually feel has intervened in their and France’s potential degeneration. “[A]nd now,” Stein says, speaking for these youth, “—well, now there is really something to do—they have to make France itself again and there is a future . . .”

(131).<sup>29</sup> In contrast to the French who Stein imagines as understanding the necessity and value of “setbacks,” Stein writes in *Wars I Have Seen* that “people like the Germans never understand that, they dream fairy tales where everything is as it was or was not, and they make music which makes them feel like that but the French know that you must not succeed you must rise from the ashes and how could you rise from the ashes if there were no ashes. . .” (105).

Many have argued that Stein’s politics leaned increasingly conservative in the World War II era, but Stein’s broader sense that America and Germany share more in common than not during the wartime era is and was a controversial position of the left. Certainly, Stein opposed what we might now call “big government.” She was a staunch antagonist to the Roosevelt administration and was at best ambivalent about Pétain’s collaboration with Germany during the war. In *Wars I Have Seen* Stein confessed that she, like France, had “so many points of view about [Pétain]” but felt on the whole that the Vichy leader deserved credit for “saving France” and “defeating Germany” (92). But Stein’s politics are complicated. Not only does she make the far-left argument that children should have the right to vote but the tenor of her Rooseveltian disdain can be radically feminist as when she compares Roosevelt to Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini in an argument against the spread of patriarchy (implicitly linked to tyranny, empire, and oppression). “There is too much fathering going on just now,” Stein writes in *Everybody’s Autobiography*: “Everybody nowadays is a father, there is father Mussolini

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<sup>29</sup> The reason I am hesitant to cite Stein’s quotations of these youth without qualification is because the syntax and style is so completely Steinian. “And now” is an expression so favored that it titles an earlier essay by Stein; likewise, Stein is so fond of illuminating things “to do” that that expression also serves as the main title for her children’s book: *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*. Stein may be paraphrasing the reflections of French youth, but the words are hers which suggests the ideas may be as well.



and father Hitler and father Roosevelt and father Stalin and father Lewis and father Blum and father Franco is just commencing now and there are ever so many more ready to be one. Fathers are depressing” (137).<sup>30</sup> Though Stein never places America and Germany side-by-side in her writings, she makes nearly identical remarks about each nation, albeit in separate texts, and likewise contrasts each nation in similar terms but again in separate texts with France. In *Paris France* it is America that lives in the past. In *Wars I Have Seen* it is Germany. In *Wars I Have Seen* Germany is the “boy” nation, stuck in a “fairy tale” imaginary.<sup>31</sup> In *Everybody’s Autobiography* and *Paris France*, America (and Stein herself) is the child who does not yet know that the world is round, still trying to make sense of the self in mother goose terms. In *Wars I Have Seen*, Germany is the nation that continues to believe in empire and esperanto and the “white man’s burden.” But in “The New Hope in Our ‘Sad Young Men,’” relinquishing “the white man’s burden” is an American problem (145).

Analogous, in Stein’s view, to the persecution of minorities in Europe is the oppression of blacks in America. After the war, when Stein meets the American soldiers who have helped to defeat Germany and to end the war, she expresses the hope that these soldiers will have internalized the suffering they have witnessed in Europe and that they will take home the lessons of the war and apply them to the American race problem. Stein relates a conversation with several American soldiers, surprised by the partnerships

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<sup>30</sup> It’s also worth remembering that there were significant reasons for members of the gay community to oppose F.D.R. who spear-headed the witch-hunt for homosexual civilians and sailors in Newport, Rhode Island in 1919-1921, a scandal that led to the Senate’s (ironic) recommendation that F.D.R. should never again hold public office.

<sup>31</sup> Stein associates the Germans with a fairy tale mentality on page 105. Several pages later, she refers to Germany as “small boyish.” In context, Stein is describing a German radio speaker she has heard who has the audacity to call England a subhuman cruel nation because it permits the use of birth control. Stein assesses this speaker and his country flatly: “And so he goes on and so they go on . . . and in the midst of all the misery it is not childish but very small boyish. It is strange the world to-day is not adult it has the mental development of a seven year old boy just about that. Dear me” (121).

forged between black and white French soldiers. In France “any soldier is as good as any other soldier” but this is something that the American soldiers agree you could not see “in any city in the United States.” Stein uses this conversation to impart a lesson, but the deeper realization comes, she feels and hopes, from the first-hand experience of wartime:

A good many of the boys begin to know what the words imprisoned and persecution mean, when they see the millions in prison, imprisoned for years, persecuted for years, they begin to realize what minorities in a country are bound to lead to, to persecution and to a sense of imprisonment. When these American boys see all the instability of a whole continent imprisoned as the whole of Europe has been in prison, well somehow it does something to them, of course it does . . . yes they will go on, innocence and a kind heart, it worries them, they are troubled, so am I, life will begin at 30 for them, so really did mine . . . (“The New Hope” 145).

The worry and anxiety that have plagued Stein since the mid 1930s have become the core attributes of this post-30 subjectivity. And they are the clear replacements for the “easy” mentality that so troubled Stein in relation to American interwar youth and to her fellow “lost generation” expatriates. The innocence that Stein references here is best described as a rehabilitated innocence, little resembling its ancient or modern predecessors. Stein’s rehabilitated innocence is not the innocence of unknowing, of pure joy, of sheltered virtue, of immunity from wrong, or even of youth. On the contrary, these innocents are thirty-somethings, soldiers embroiled in violence, and they are Americans who are beginning to realize their and their nation’s guilt in a similar system of oppression. Those who are familiar with Genesis will be struck by the image of paradise lost. In the place of Edenic innocence Stein posits wartime consciousness as the psychological space where “Life will begin.” Knowledge of evil is crucial to this new beginning. The sheltered happiness and virtue quintessential to popular nineteenth-century notions of childhood

are replaced in Stein's aged-down imaginary by an anxiety and worry wrought by so much knowledge and so much exposure to suffering.

Some have described Stein's late modernist interest in child language as evidence that her writings of this period are "nostalgic" (Olson 113) or have described her criticism of Rooseveltian New Deal politics as evidence of "her nostalgia for individualism" (Bridgman 276). In these instances, "nostalgia" serves as a kind of diagnosis that has the effect of dismissing Stein's interest in childhood and children's narratives and of diminishing her politics. In my reading, and we may look to the passage just cited from "The New Hope," Stein's efforts to rescript the first 30 years of life are pointedly anti-nostalgic because they are pointedly anti-youth. A number of scholars have dissected the historical, cultural, and fantastical components of this pervasive modern concept. Johannes Hofer coined the term "nostalgia" in 1688 as a medical term to diagnose the potentially fatal homesickness he observed in Swiss mercenaries serving on foreign soil. The Greek roots *nostos*, signifying a homecoming, and *algos*, signifying suffering or pain, illuminate nostalgia's medical intent to encapsulate both the disease and its cure. The treatment for home sickness was a return home or to allot more time spent at home between deployments. There are a number of important differences between this largely eighteenth-century view of nostalgia and the concept's twentieth and twenty-first century permutations. Svetlana Boym points out that what was originally conceived as "a passing ailment" has "turned into the incurable modern condition" (xiv). Nostalgia is no longer a problem of the few who have been physically removed from a physical, geographical place, it is a collective psychological condition of internal exile. And the cure is less a return to a physical place than an impossible return to a particular time. Boym writes:

“nostalgia goes beyond individual psychology. At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams” (xv). As Robert Hemmings outlines “By the late eighteenth century . . . the nostalgic yearns not so poignantly to return to the place of one’s childhood—a treatment favored by Hofer—but to childhood itself” (55).

Stein’s anti-nostalgic position is generalized and pervasive, working against nostalgia’s contemporary ties to childhood, its historical roots in wartime, and its aesthetic conveyance in narrative. What is unique about Stein’s anti-nostalgia is that childhood is not the source of healing. It is the source of illness. Also unique about Stein’s anti-nostalgia is that wartime can serve as an assistive cure. The list of features Stein uses to describe American life before the second world war — “easy wars, easy victories, easy success, easy money, easy eating and easy drinking and easy madly running around and easy publicity, easy everything” — is not unlike a list of symptoms. They cause life to be over at thirty. By contrast, the realization of suffering and imprisonment brought to light by the second world war may launch “new hope” for a renewed life.

Beyond childhood, nostalgia’s literary bulwarks are a significant target of Stein’s anti-nostalgia. Stein’s parodies of several classic children’s genres — the fairy tale, the first reader, the alphabet book — are only one piece of this story. Stein’s nearly allegorical wartime writings also provide a thinly veiled post-mortem analysis of high, 1920s modernism. This list of problems for Americans and for youth double as a list of problems (in Stein’s view) for many celebrated modernists with their easy successes, easy drinking, and easy publicity. Stein uses the language of modernism to describe the

problem of America's youth mentality. The title of Stein's essay "The New Hope in Our 'Sad Young Men'" alludes to a collection of short stories, *All the Sad Young Men* (1926), by F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose personal bouts with fame and alcoholism and mental instability epitomize Stein's subject. Stein even calls this generation the "lost generation." This was an appellation popularized by Hemingway who forebodingly introduced his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), with the epigraph "You are all a lost generation," but he attributes the expression to Stein. Though Stein and Hemingway too, used the phrase to describe the young men who had served in and survived the first world war, by 1945, when Stein writes "The New Hope in Our 'Sad Young Men,'" the phrase is also inextricably linked to American modernists (like Hemingway and Fitzgerald) who, after the war, expatriated to France.

Later in *Everybody's Autobiography*, Stein offers the correction that it was, in fact, a hotel keeper "who said what it is said I said that the war generation was a lost generation" (53). However, what the hotel keeper says and what Stein comes to mean by it are not precisely the same. For the Frenchman the lost generation is a generation of men who have missed out, in the male-dominated context of war, on a crucial developmental stage: the stage in a man's youth ("between 17 and 25") when he is "civilized" by the influence of women. But for Stein the lost generation is as much quintessentially American as it is male and what's more the war is less the turning point than what leads up to it. In response to questions about whether Stein thinks the second war generation will be like the first, Stein writes: "No I do not think so. And I do not think so for a most excellent reason, they are sad young men already, if you are sad young men then there is a fair chance that life will begin at 30 instead of ending at 30 . .

.” (“The New Hope” 142). Unlike the hotel keeper, the crucial period for Stein is not the period “between 17 and 25” but the period “between babyhood and 14.” It matters that these sad young men were sad “already,” made so by the great depression of the 1930s.

The “new hope” for youth, for America, for Stein, is also a new hope for modernism. As Gill Plain has described, the “myths of heroism and glory” that fueled the modernist poetics of the first war have already been broken by the onset of the second world war. Overall, the voice of resistance seems muted in the literature of the second war. But Plain also notes that for women writers of late modernism the forms of resistance have changed: “while established women writers as diverse as Virginia Woolf and Vera Brittain turned their pens to war, their preoccupation was less with the outward destruction of war, than with a more introspective contemplation of the human condition under war” (2-3). Stein’s late modernism performs violent deaths, disappearances, representations, and parodies but all are ultimately representations of an internal violence. The violence her work directs toward nostalgia, its narrative conveyances, and its childhood haunts concomitantly enacts an internal violence against the child, the home, and the text. In her late cluster of wartime texts, including *The World is Round*, *Paris France*, *To Do: A Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*, *Wars I Have Seen*, and “The New Hope in Our ‘Sad Young Men,’” Stein seeks out a different generational model, and she seeks out an alternative generic form in which to give it shape. Though many have read “childishness” as well as the surrender to French collaborationist politics in Stein’s wartime literature, given a wider frame, it becomes clear that there is no recognizable child within Stein’s wartime figurations of childhood. Conceptually, the child within has been a vehicle for preserving a longed for, idealized, and mythical past. Stein comes to

see this as a nineteenth-century mentality that has no place in the middle of the twentieth century, and worse, she comes to identify this mentality as the cause of the war. Through autobiography, through mother goose and fairy tales, through alphabets and first readers, Stein recapitulates time and time again her connection to the nineteenth century and to the romanticization of childhood and each time, in every context, she performs the violence — through metaphor, through dramatization, through parody — of rupturing this bond. In *Wars I Have Seen* Stein describes the violent struggle “to help kill the century in which you are born . . . and between babyhood and fourteen, I was there to begin to kill what was not dead, the nineteenth century which was so sure of evolution and prayers, and esperanto and their ideas” (21). In a way, these murderous confessions work at a remove from their real target. In naming the nineteenth century as the thing to be killed, Stein diminishes the fact that what also must be killed, maybe even primarily so, is her own childhood and youth. The ideas of evolution and prayer and esperanto and empire belonged to a former century, and they belonged to a former self.

Late modernism, exemplified in part by Stein’s wartime writing, dramatically shifted course from the fields of innovation and resistance that so marked modernism at its height. Though interest in late modernism has grown substantially, many scholars have noted the appearance, at least, of a favoritism in modernist studies towards modernism’s emergence — when aesthetic resistance was highlighted as an integral part of the modernist paradigm. As Rebecca Walkowitz and Douglas Mao have eloquently observed: for many there is nothing quite so “good” as “bad” modernism. In contrast to the experimental anarchist energies of early and high modernism, late modernism can seem as radically conservative. In the same way that readers confront Eliot’s late

religious conversion or Pound's fascist ideologies, many confront Stein's late modernist life and work with dismay. It is nearly inconceivable that this avant-garde, feminist, lesbian, Jewish woman could develop and indeed use to her advantage a friendship like the one Stein maintained with Bernard Faÿ, a known anti-Semite and collaborationist. But if Stein's wartime life strains understanding, her writing is at least as taxing for most. Stein's children's narrativity is disorienting if not also offensive, particularly when it is intermingled and interspersed throughout her writings on the German occupation of France. With the exception of *The World is Round*, Stein's children's books are almost universally unconscionable as such. In fact, Stein's children's literature and her wartime writings are unconscionable for the same reason. In the same way that the children's literature assaults the nostalgic ideals of childhood, Stein's wartime writing may too represent an assault on the nostalgic ideals of modernism. The broad academic oversight of Stein's children's literature and the criticism of her late wartime writings may be two pieces of a nostalgic whole. The first upholds the ideals of childhood as the assuredly unserious counterpart to the serious atrocities of war. The second upholds a past literary tradition of modernist resistance, particularly in the face of war.

Where childhood represents one kind of nostalgic home; early modernism represents another. Stein, I have endeavored to show, violently dismantles both. As Marina MacKay has argued "the soldier poets of the Great War set the standard by which the literature of the second war was judged wanting" (5). But if there is a child of modernism more unpreferred than late modernism, it is, as expressed most explicitly by Edmund Wilson, the late modernist turn to writing for children. Here writers like Stein appear to commit a double-effrontery: they seem to exchange their earlier efforts at



avant-garde resistance for another, apparently ordinary set of clothes, and they appear to change in their trademark difficulty for the generic equivalent of easy reading. And yet to really read Stein's children's books and children's narratives (as few actually have) is to discover that there is nothing easy about them. In fact, in an ironic turn of logic, what's quintessentially "easy" for Stein is high modernism. It is an odd turn of events, but Stein's late work may prove more radical than many have been willing to consider. Stein's wartime writings not only challenge American imperialism, not only question the "difficulty" of early modernism, but they also question the value of childhood and youth as an epicenter for American and modernist consciousness in the twentieth century.

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