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# Disruption and disappointment: relationships of children and nostalgia in British interwar fiction

Elsbeth Anne Taylor  
*University of Iowa*

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DISRUPTION AND DISAPPOINTMENT:  
RELATIONSHIPS OF CHILDREN AND NOSTALGIA  
IN BRITISH INTERWAR FICTION

by

Elsbeth Anne Taylor

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Master of Arts degree  
in English (Literary Studies)  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2011

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Linda Bolton

Graduate College  
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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MASTER'S THESIS

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Elspeth Anne Taylor

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Master of Arts degree in English (Literary Studies) at the May 2011 graduation.

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION: LOCATING THE CHILD AND NOSTALGIA

The 1930's were a fruitful decade in British literature: modernism was flourishing, with the publication of novels by Aldous Huxley, Jean Rhys, and James Joyce, and poetry by T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and W.H. Auden. On a historical level, the people of Britain were still dealing with the disruptive aftereffects of the Great War and were, although they did not realize it at the time, nearing the end of their interwar period: a time that divided the Great War from what would become World War Two. Among the modernist authors producing major work during the interwar period were Virginia Woolf, Wyndham Lewis, and Evelyn Waugh. During the first half of the 1930's, each of the three authors published a novel that would become one of their most notable works. Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931) was a wildly experimental exploration of aging and memory; Wyndham Lewis's satirical *The Apes of God* (1930) would instigate controversy within Britain's modernist set, particularly in its depiction of a family of adult-children; Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* (1934) focused on a man's fondness for his home and the past.

The novels' aesthetic and thematic differences were indicative of each author's individuality under the broad scope of modernism, which differed wildly in the Thirties. Evelyn Waugh deviated from the "high" modernism of Lewis and Woolf through his novels' absence of outstanding formal or thematic experimentalism. Waugh's lack of explicit collaborative ties to other modernist writers also positioned him as a virtual outsider to more experimental or controversial forms of modernist writing. In stark contrast to Waugh, Virginia Woolf is among the first names that come up when artists,

students, or critics address Modernism. Her textual form and content are often wildly and obviously experimental, and her affiliation with the Bloomsbury group—a collective of artists, writers, and other thinkers—placed her within a sort of artistic commune. In comparison to Lewis and Waugh, Woolf was the most clear-cut Modernist, at least to twentieth and twenty-first century readers and scholars. Finally, Wyndham Lewis was a talented and extremely prolific writer who moved through several schools of modernist thought. The most notable of these movements was Vorticism, an anti-Futurist avant-garde manifestation of literary and visual art that Ezra Pound also espoused. Lewis is still considered a significant figure in the world of art and art history, but was virtually written out of the literary canon due to the pro-fascist, pro-Hitler beliefs that he held prior to World War II—and during his writing of *The Apes of God*. But Lewis's strong aversion to the Bloomsbury group and his affiliation with British fascism prior to the second World War positioned him in direct opposition to Virginia Woolf and her affiliates.

Style, content, and affiliations within the world of modernism divide Woolf, Lewis, and Waugh. Yet each of their novels from the early 1930's focus on characters' memories and visualizations of an elusive or illusory past, which has frequently disappointing relationships with the characters' experience of the present and imagination of the future. Each of the novelists developed this disappointment in a similar way: by looking at children and their relationship with conceptions of time and history. The three modernist authors often have conflicting or incongruous perspectives of childhood, as we will see. Despite the absence of a united vision, Woolf, Lewis, and Waugh create child-characters that are crucial to the plot and thematic development of their respective stories.

Furthermore, the interwar modernists tie their children to a larger, and just as complicated, concept: the past. In making such a connection, the authors enter into an existing discourse: Carolyn Steedman argues that over time, and especially within the past two centuries, child-figures and childhood evolved into tools “used to express the depths of historicity within individuals” as well as figures connecting to psychological promises of retrieving a lost past (12). For Steedman, childhood becomes a tool for verifying and bolstering the actual existence of personal history as well as offering a gateway through which that individual can address and access the past, at least in theory. I wish to take this connection of children and the personal desire to establish ones’ own place in history a step further by explicitly connecting children with the concept of nostalgia in the modernist era.

Nostalgia and children are rarely connected in discussions of modernist literature or text. Yet fictional children often represent significant investments in and hopes for the future as well as keys to memory and the past. The relationship of children and nostalgia in modernist writings is, I believe, a crucial and overlooked aspect of modernist writing: it transcends specific group ideology, associations, and boundaries, reaching across the range of modernist aesthetics. This is not to imply that the gap is important because of a united vision of their relationship. On the contrary: the balance of the child-nostalgia relationship can vary widely between texts. In *A Handful of Dust*, Evelyn Waugh focuses primarily on nostalgia and its problems and manifestations, rather than children—though children were crucial players in the novel’s depiction of nostalgia, they did not themselves embody nostalgic impulses. In contrast, Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* clearly invests in childhood as a doorway for nostalgic desires and memories. And Wyndham

Lewis presents the most complex case of all in his biting satire, *The Apes of God*, developing an environment in which childhood is opposed to the romanticization of the past, yet simultaneously a mechanism for accessing an idealized history.

Within the past decade, numerous critics including Troy Boone, Claudia Nelson, and Basudeo Sharma have written on the emerging awareness of children's social, literary, and legal lives that occurred during the Victorian period. And since the Second World War, work written about the relationship between children and literature in contemporary society has flourished in journals like *Children's Literature* and work done by critics including Dennis Butts and Peter Hunt. But this leaves a rather glaring gap between the end of Victorianism and World War II: conveniently (or oddly), the absence of truly significant critical attention to children in the modernist period.

One possible explanation for this hole is an absence of outstanding child characters in modernist fiction. Hope Howell Hodgkins remarks that, in terms of fictional presence, children "receive little [attention] in the high modernist era, which in its peculiar aloofness from childhood makes an island between Victorian sentimentality of the Golden Age and postmodern interest in children" (357). And the response to this island seems to transfer into a corresponding absence of widespread scholarly interest concerning or involving child characters in modernist literature. But while Hodgkins correctly perceives a significant decrease in explicit or extended treatment of children—there are few, if any, *Oliver Twist* or *Kim* equivalents in modernist Britain—her explanation is not entirely satisfactory. Children frequently appear in modernist novels, playing roles that are crucial to their novels' thematic and artistic development. Though it is easy to write off children that fall between the gap of Victorianism and post-



modernism as inconsequential, minor figures, I believe that such an opinion is an oversimplification, and perhaps a tactic of avoiding the complicated roles that children play across the boundaries of “modernism.”

An additional explanation is that modernists, especially British authors disillusioned by the Great War and in the midst of a time of political questioning and national transition, would desire to remove themselves from the romanticism of the Victorian era. One method of distancing themselves from romanticism would be to avoid a favored subject of romanticism: namely, children. To a group that was concerned with the events surrounding a war on unprecedentedly large turf, the idea of children as symbols of hope might seem farcical, the idea of a romantic future impossible. Yet Margaret R. Higonnet observes that modernists who participated in the visual arts were often drawn to children in the roles of aesthetic metaphors, models, and audience members (86). And the frequent overlap between visual and literary modernism—most famously seen in the Bloomsbury Group in Britain, Gertrude Stein’s salons in France, and Wyndham Lewis’s dual status as writer and painter—imply a noticeable connection between the different artistic modes. It does not seem plausible that the visual and literary branches of modernism, which were often in close proximity with one another, would have such grossly differing foci or perspectives. This points to a notable gap in critical recognition of children in modernism—either a significant and unstudied divide between visual and literary modernist subjects, or a total oversight regarding the place of children in British modernist literature.

But children certainly do exist in modernist texts—and furthermore, their presences complicate and enliven the works—so this critical gap deserves to be filled.

The modernist treatment of children, however overlooked and understudied, has given a new kind of richness to the way that authors after modernism approach children and childhood—and I do intend to be broad with “approach children and childhood,” because I believe that this pertains to the entire scope of literature’s dealings with pre-adolescent figures. The child-figures in *The Apes of God*, *A Handful of Dust*, and *The Waves* are not positive figures, though each novel has child-figures that provide some amusement—often darkly. Though these children may be overlooked by other characters or downplayed by the novel’s narrative, they are rarely treated as generic figures or examples of a “type,” which allows authors after modernism to continue to look at childhood and the child in increasingly complex ways.

The modernists’ increasingly nuanced and controversial constructions of children, particularly in relationship to nostalgic tendency and desire, require some preliminary clarification: in order to discuss the textual relationships between children and nostalgia in any meaningful way, it is first necessary to explicitly lay out the scope and limitations of the specific terms “child” and “nostalgia.” And since nostalgia in interwar Britain was so frequently intertwined with the figures of children, it is imperative that children be identified and treated as individuals, separate from characterizations of adults.

Any discussion of human growth, both mental and physical, requires a clear definition of the terms and concepts that the discussion will encompass. So in order to make any kind of argument about a connection between childhood and adulthood, especially one centering on the somewhat fraught concept of nostalgia, it is also necessary for me to clarify exactly what I mean when I talk about “children” and “adults.” Defining the term “child” is a rather slippery issue: in what specific, qualitative

ways do children differ from adults? Where is—or is there—a dividing line between the state of being a child and the state of being adult? What happens to instigate the growth of a person (or, in this case, character) from childhood to adulthood—and more specifically, (how) do modernists understand it?

Authors and historians have struggled to come to a consensus regarding where and how the shift from childhood to adulthood occurs and how to conceptualize and treat children. Philippe Ariés proposes that during the middle ages, childhood was not a recognizable period of time (124). Instead, children were those individuals who were unable to survive without care from protective figures (i.e. mothers or nannies). “Childhood” as such, then, ended at the age in which they were not immediately and always dependent on authority figures, or around five to seven years of age—by contemporary standards, extremely early (Heywood 11). And Carolyn Steedman suggests that Britain during the nineteenth century reiterated this sense of the child as a dependent figure, but that childhood during that century was both a “time span” and a “category of experience”—meaning that a child was not confined within a specific age range, but occupied a rather pliable space in time (7).

Since the apparently simple issue of the child is, in reality, quite complex, it is above all important to explore exactly how one can differentiate children from adults. There are many potential criteria for such classification. They tend to fall into two large categories. The first, and more common, category is based on physical attributes and biological distinctions between child and adult. But even this apparently straightforward category presents its own divisions, controversies, and alternative understandings. Physical characteristics of childhood can be based on physical or sexual maturity; in the

“biologically immature” phase (a term borrowed from Colin Heywood), childhood would comprise the period of time up to the point at which an individual reached puberty or would be otherwise fully physically developed (170). Although this might seem to be an acceptable definition, it still leaves much to be desired. At what point is a person physically mature? Since the human body continually undergoes the processes of aging, growth, and decay, setting strict parameters for “child” in terms of age or bodily development seems to be subjective—or, at the very least, purely comparative—given the absence of any general consensus in modernist or even twentieth century definitions of the child.

The second broad category that can be used separate children from adults is a psychological state, or the way in which a person thinks and perceives the world. This category encompasses the area of human awareness that is not based on a physical states or capabilities: for example, mental maturity or emotional maturity. Determining the state of childhood by an individual’s relative lack of awareness of the world around them might seem, at first glance, to be a logical point of division between child and adult. But the problems with this category should also be obvious: unlike physical maturity, there is no quick or definitive way to gauge emotional maturity or mental maturity—in fact, there does not seem to be any rubric to definitively differentiate “adult” mentalities from those of children. And, like physical maturity, each of the options in psychological maturity is unsteady; to what extent can any person reach “full” emotional or mental maturity?

Attempts to solve the problem of determining a childhood seem to raise more questions than provide answers. The two broad categories of physical and psychological maturity fail to encompass a series of additional traits that could be used to divide the

states of child- and adulthood. The first of these qualities is economic independence: individual ability to work or support oneself financially. Entrance into sexual awareness could fall under the category of either physical or mental development. Educational progress could also be a marker. And there are, to be sure, many other potentially differentiating factors that I have not listed. But not everyone will reach emotional, mental, or “educational” maturity. Regarding economic independence, it is possible to be financially dependent and remain an “adult” (for example, heirs of large inheritances or workers with disabilities who rely on governmental aid). And these dividers do not even begin to cover less literal or obvious categories: for example, the categorization of adults as, forever, the children of their parents or referring to one’s followers as one’s children.

To be clear, I am not trying to find a single *right* way to define the child or unite the many interpretations of child and childhood. Just the opposite: I want to clarify that the issue with these definitions is that none of them are truly satisfactory. All of them seem to have some kind of exterior deciding factor—a mediator or precedent that *decides* whether or not a person is a child or adult. And the person, group, or mark that determines when an individual undergoes the change from child to adult is, in every case, unclear.

The difficulty of finding a single “right” or definitive solution to the problem of dividing children from adults highlights the intrinsic subjectivity of the terms “child” and “adult.” This discrepancy can also be seen in the ways that Lewis, Waugh, and Woolf try to come to terms with children and childhood in their respective texts. And indeed, each of the modernists approaches the division of children and adulthood with individual nuances and concerns, constructing different definitions of “children” or completely

eschewing simplistic notions of a child/adult division. As we will see later, Wyndham Lewis will combine an ironic perspective of the aging corporeal state in relation to often-performed actions and mentality of childhood. Virginia Woolf will initially render the child as a discoverer, a figure that explores and recognizes the separate spaces of adulthood and childhood. Evelyn Waugh's children, the most lifelike, will become instigators that push the plot forward, refusing to let adults' nostalgia stagnate.

One of the dangers in approaching children in modernist fiction is the temptation to read child characters as autobiographical doorways into the mind or opinions of each respective author. The children and child-figures that exist in each novel are important as such, but are not realistic or biographical portrayals of real children—nor are they necessarily indicative of the modernists' personal visions of the child and childhood. Rather, the lack of fixity in defining the child as such are a form of experimentation and boundary-pushing, an intentional deviation from past (i.e. Victorian) standards of narration and thought that vary between each author in their presentation and focus.

Like the problems surrounding a straightforward, simple definition of "child," particularly in relation to British modernism, the word *nostalgia* defies singular categorization. Similarly, Lewis, Waugh, and Woolf will, through the course of their writing, resist a unified concept or presentation of nostalgia, especially when it corresponds to their child-figures. In order to avoid unnecessary repetition in my novel-specific study of the interwar texts, I will construct the grounding of nostalgia here by presenting and discussing the term's three most outstanding forms and their particular significance to interwar modernism. In order to represent the broad reaches and

manifestations of nostalgia, I will focus on a general historical and critical understanding, rather than concepts rooted in one particular period or school of thought.

The first manifestation of nostalgia was not, as might be expected, a sense of longing for the past or the “good old days.” Rather, Svetlana Boym traces the origins of the term *nostalgia* to 1688, when a Swiss doctor named Johannes Hofer constructed a new word from the Greek roots *nostos*, or “return home,” and *algia*, or “longing,” to give a name to what was at the time a medical condition (xiii, 3). Medical nostalgia was understood to be an intense, traumatic homesickness able to affect mental faculties: sufferers experienced a feeling “akin to paranoia, only instead of a persecution mania, the nostalgic was possessed by a mania of longing” (4). The term “nostalgia” continued to be used in a medical context through the first decades of the twentieth century, though it had largely faded from common diagnosis by that time. Furthermore, this “mania of longing” often had an incapacitating effect on the sufferer’s body: Hofer noted that physical symptoms could include loss of appetite and nausea, fever, brain inflammation, and cardiac arrests. Mental affects could include suicidal desires (4).

Victims of medical nostalgia were overwhelmingly male, and beginning in the nineteenth century, their disease was believed to be a reaction against the fragmentation that an increasingly modernized world left in its wake—evolving modes of transportation, communication, and warfare that complicated means of living (Chu 83). This connection to war accounted for the primarily male-based character of the disease; soldiers on a battlefield far from home were, more than any other group in Britain, exposed to a very real severance from their lives and experiences in their mother country. These men were cut off from their homes by distance and lifestyle; everyday activities

were drastically altered by the events and traumas of war, as were soldiers' surroundings and the company they kept. But more significant than altered routine was the overarching problem that led to nostalgia: the victims' sense that they no longer had direct ties to their native country. The soldiers' bodies were removed from the soil, which seemed to have a similarly disruptive effect on the state of their mentalities.

Patricia E. Chu's application of nostalgia to Rebecca West's *Return of the Soldier* sets a precedent of visualizing medical nostalgia in relation to a specific modernist text. Chu reads the character Chris's medical amnesia (paired with overwhelming shellshock from participating in the Great War) as an extreme case of nostalgia's intense effects on mental status (83-84). Medical nostalgia, then, highlights two kinds of violence: the first, regarding literal violence in war; the second is the violence of an individual's severance from a sense of the familiar. The violence of nostalgia in West's novel is not identical to that of the novels by Lewis, Waugh, or Woolf, yet Chu's observations regarding the violence of nostalgia in the modernist novel will appear in the interwar authors' novels through nostalgia's ties to warfare and its effects on the body/mind. Furthermore, her application of medical nostalgia in a modernist context is a precedent for a more widespread consideration of the possibilities of nostalgia in relation to British interwar texts.

The second variety of nostalgia that I will consider is grounded in the hyperreal, as defined by Jean Baudrillard. This concept is the crucial base of the second kind of nostalgia, which is present in a cultural environment. In setting up a vision of cultural-wide nostalgia, I am first concerned with Baudrillard's concepts of simulations and



simulacra in the construction of hyperreality, then in connecting the hyperreal with nostalgic perspective.

In short, the hyperreal is based on the action of simulation and the image of simulacra. Simulations and simulacra are, respectively, actions and images that represent a reality that has never actually existed. The hyperreal is a simulation of a simulation—in other words, the presentation of something that has never existed, yet is given the guise of reality. Imagination creates the hyperreal product that the mind accepts as real, although this constructed (hyper)reality does not rely upon a citable source for its generation. A hyperreal world is a world in which the real is not longer present; rather, it is subverted by simulacra that are accepted and treated as real. Thus this simulation of space and time becomes hyperreal, “a real without origin or reality,” and the presence of the imaginary conceals reality’s non-existence (1, 14). This concept of the hyperreal links neatly with nostalgia. The impossibility of perfectly rendering the real parallels the impossibility of achieving a perfect rendering of the past: the past becomes hyperreal because it is unattainable. So, then, nostalgia is a way of constructing hyperreality that makes a simulated version of the past available by accessing the imaginary, and its manifestation can range from the fairly mundane to the pathological.

An imaginary (constructed) past will come into play in each of the interwar novels in this study. It might consist of individuals’ recollections of feelings or understandings of situations that stand in and claim to represent the “real” past. Yet Baudrillard’s concept of nostalgia deviates away from the individual diagnosis seen in medical nostalgia; instead of being an individualized, treatable condition, his nostalgia affects a widespread group—an entire culture of beings. In order for such a widespread,

complicated notion of simulated reality to exist, there must be a group participation and investment in the idea. This form of nostalgia is much more insidious than medical nostalgia because its presentation is not nearly as noticeable in the individual—though individuals participate in (or fall under the illusion of) hyperreal nostalgia, the widespread character of the nostalgia masks its presence in single subjects. But the true “trick” of the hyperreal is that its subjects are unable to recognize the falseness that is inherent in their so-called reality.

In the contemporary era, nostalgia has found a third niche: a longing for the “good old days.” This form of nostalgia borrows significantly from Baudrillard’s concepts of the hyperreal, but lacks the underlying implication of a culture-wide understanding and widespread base, manifesting itself instead in personal wishes, desires, and memories. Elizabeth Outka notices this form of watered-down, reminiscent nostalgia in literary modernism’s tension between the old and new; the conflict, she notices, centers around a romanticization of the past in search for something “pure” or “sanctified,” rather than the actual existence of the past with all of its own worries and complications (95). And Svetlana Boym identifies the primary twentieth-century understanding of nostalgia as a particular “sentiment of loss and displacement” in response to the loss of a home that no longer or never existed, as well as “a romance with one’s own fantasy.” (xiii). Though this romanticization and fantasy take place on an individual level, Boym notices that “good old days” nostalgia has become an “incurable” condition of modernity (xiv).

This reminiscent nostalgia might seem to be fairly simple in comparison to Baudrillard’s perspective of nostalgia in relation to the hyperreal, but this third version of nostalgia can serve both positive and negative functions. The fantasy-pasts that these

nostalgics create may be the remnants of their own pasts or places in time and space that were outside of their lifetime and realm of experience. In a positive way, nostalgic remembrance of the past can make events more tolerable or pleasing to the memory. It can also maintain an individual's connection to people, places, or events that are no longer in existence.

But, like hyperreal nostalgia, those who dream of the good old days remember a past that did not exist in the way their imaginations reconstruct it, because their imagination lacks the wholeness or unity of that bygone time. They participate in an essentially escapist activity that encourages them to build a version of the world that eliminates major problems and constantly promotes the primacy of a lost past over the current existence of the present. When the nostalgic uses these constructions of the past to envision and instruct the present and future, their individual, false notions can have destructive effects on their own lives and relationships as well as the lives of others. Since reminiscent nostalgics' delusions of (nonexistent) pasts can have effects in their activities and interactions, even the most "individualized" nostalgia becomes a *public* concern, rather than an individual concern, because the delusions are no longer limited to the body and mind of the sufferer.

In all three varieties of nostalgia—medical, hyperreal, and reminiscent—the key aspect of nostalgia is also the most insidious. Nostalgia is a desire for the past—sometimes a yearning to return to past events or states of existence, sometimes an urge to regain the innocence of lost time, sometimes a wish to reconnect with people and places that have changed or no longer exist. The problem with these desires is that they look toward illusions of a past that has never existed; although the places, times, and people

may have actually existed in the past, the nostalgic's reconstruction is a fiction, a romanticized or skewed version of that past. Furthermore, if the time that is the focus of nostalgia occurred prior to the sufferers' lifetimes, there is no way that they could hope to be able to remember it; it is out of their realm of experience and is permanently inaccessible, except through delusion.

Nostalgia has historically been seen as a medical condition/disease; a socio-historical condition; and, most generally, a way of looking at the past under a romanticized lens. Dealing with the varying interpretations and effects of nostalgia raises major questions: How does one correctly remember the past? Is it possible? And if it is possible, is nostalgia at all a healthy, responsible, or "good" way to do so? As with definitions of childhood, no single understanding of nostalgia, whether medical, social, or sentimental, seems to be able to stand by itself as the (single) definitive or primary concept. Furthermore, these supposedly individual ideas of nostalgia frequently overlap.

So, like the definition(s) of "child," the definition(s) of "nostalgia" are at once ambiguous and problematic. But Lewis, Waugh, and Woolf will each deal with the problem—if it is indeed a problem—of nostalgic thought and construction individually, tying it irrevocably to the figures of children that populate their respective novels.

Though I have primarily raised questions and provided a frame for thought regarding the nature of children/childhood and nostalgia, I will now shift from dealing primarily with theory and crucial underlying topics to a specific study of the two topics in each interwar novel, addressing the works individually. The many dimensions of the child in the three novels alone will indicate the illusion behind the idea of a universal notion of the child and childhood and result in a similarly complicated view of nostalgia, as we will see.

## CHAPTER II

NOSTALGIA DISRUPTED: *A HANDFUL OF DUST*

*A Handful of Dust* has, through its title, obvious ties to canonical modernism; it explicitly referenced T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and the novel's epigraph was an excerpt from the same work. Yet Evelyn Waugh was not generally affiliated with any particular modernist movement during his lifetime, and his work reflected this lack of affiliation: rather than attempt to revolutionize or scandalize the literary world with textual or thematic innovation, his novels relied on fairly conventional formal frames. Despite the absence of overt textual experimentation or group affiliation (as Virginia Woolf had experienced with Bloomsbury, or Lewis with the Vorticists), Waugh was, at least in retrospect, solidly modernist. He was certainly writing and publishing at the same time as well-known Modernists, including Woolf and Lewis, Eliot, and Pound, and his work was considered to be of high quality, as his contemporary Rebecca West recognized (Stannard 95-96). Mark Perrino similarly identifies his acquaintanceship with the Sitwell family, associates of the Bloomsbury Group that Lewis satirized in his 1930 novel *The Apes of God* (54).

In my introduction, I wrote that children and nostalgia would have varying levels of emphasis in each of the three interwar novels in this study. As the initial novel that I will explore, it seems appropriate that Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* focuses less on children and primarily on nostalgia—a thematic decision that will contrast with the evolving manifestations of children in Woolf and Lewis. Yet children are critical to Waugh's novel; when they interact with adults, they remain for the most part unchanged, but have a particularly transformative effect on the adults in question. Their catalytic

effect has, for the adults' nostalgia, a result that is as dismal as the novel's referential title seems to foreshadow.

There are only two outstanding child characters in Waugh's novel: the main character's son, John Andrew, and Winnie, the daughter of a fairly minor character. And even these children appear only in various episodes, rather than consistently throughout the novel. So, rather predictably, Evelyn Waugh's portrayals of children in *A Handful of Dust* have been generally skimmed over by critics. If Waugh was, as Hope Howell Hodgkins submits, "the most family-minded modernist writer" (he would later have seven children, in comparison to Woolf and Lewis, who remained childless) then this apparent dearth of children is not promising for the significance of children in modernist literature at all, let alone in relation to as broad and widespread a concept as nostalgia (358). Yet these children, though few in number, play crucial roles in the 1934 novel's development of nostalgia as mediated through the main character, Tony Last.

Perhaps Waugh is indeed the most family-minded modernist, for despite his own state of childlessness during his writing of the 1934 publication, he does not seem to find the notion or state of childhood particularly troublesome; his child-characters are fairly realistic: they speak and act believably, defy caricature, and are easily distinguishable from adults in their language and actions. John Andrew Last, Tony's son, is somewhere around the age of six, still young enough to require a nanny. His youthfulness, never explicitly specified by age, and his fairly precocious personality allow Waugh to focus his humor in John Andrew's speech and actions, which often parrot the lower-classed, "filthy" language of an estate stable hand. And Winnie, a "plain child with large gold-rimmed spectacles," is a somewhat mundane eight-year-old who gets carsick, wants to go

to the seaside, and demands ices during her brief appearances in the work (129, 127). Though their “realistic” depiction in *A Handful of Dust* may seem to indicate a correspondence between fictional and real children, such a connection is illusory—wishful thinking, at best. Rather than functioning as a direct transference of children into the novel or a reflection of Waugh’s opinion of children, John Andrew and Winnie act as catalytic figures, tools that assist the progress both of the plot and the revelation of Tony Last’s pathological nostalgia, as we will see.

The few instances in Waugh’s text that hint at any ambiguity in the border between childhood and adulthood center on horses. In the most notable instance, John Andrew has acquired a new horse on his sixth birthday, a replacement for the Shetland pony that had provided a doorway into the world of riding. The transition between horses is also the beginning of a transition from child- to adulthood: “Before her arrival riding had been a very different thing...Now it was a man’s business”—as opposed to child’s play (17). But even this potential ambivalence is not serious—though riding might be a man’s business, John Andrew is, Waugh makes clear, certainly not a man. He still requires instruction from the stable hand, Ben, and the continued supervision of a nanny. Though children and adults may interact with one another, in even his driest humor Waugh’s images of childhood, particularly John Andrew’s appearances, are clearly set as an experience separated from adulthood.

Similarly clear-cut, at least initially, is Waugh’s presentation of nostalgia, seen through the eyes and experiences of his main character, Tony Last. Tony reveals his desire to maintain the past through his wishes for a comfortable, unchanging world. His estate, Hetton Abbey, forms the “world” that allows him to maintain his unrealistic

beliefs and expectations. Not only does Hetton offer him an arena for his hopeful nostalgia, but the building itself is also a subject of Tony's past-obsessed fantasies. Such a nostalgic attachment to homes and buildings is not a fictional fluke; the obsession with the past, in terms of home décor and maintenance, was a widely-recognized aspect of British culture in between the First and Second World Wars. Interwar Britain was characterized by a population that was "too enchanted with [their nation's] glorious history," according to Deborah Cohen, particularly in terms of domestic architectural style (179). This near-obsessive enchantment with the past was commonly demonstrated in the organization of the household. After the First World War, throwbacks to the Regency and Empire styles, rather than more contemporary architectural concepts, became popular among well-to-do residents of Britain (Cohen 182). Tony Last actively participates as a member of this historically-enchanted populace, but his interest in the past emerges differently than his more mainstream, non-fictional contemporaries.

Though Tony avoids furnishing his home in the more prevalent Empire or Regency styles, he proudly preserves Hetton Abbey as a Gothic structure, then an architecturally unpopular style—a local guidebook suggests that since its 1864 refurbishing, the house is "devoid of interest" (12). Despite this published view of his home, Tony clings to the belief that "the time would come, perhaps in John Andrew's day, when opinion would reinstate Hetton in its proper place"—as an environment that embodies and epitomizes a national vision of glorious British history (13). Through Hetton, Tony visualizes a national past with which he can tie his personal and family history—a past that he believes is exemplified the home he has meticulously maintained. Tony lives in an entirely fabricated world, since he has constructed an interior with what



Charles Rice terms “nostalgia for lost origins” in order to connect himself with the wider, culturally-revered past that he has not experienced (5). He is, like other members of his social circle, a member of a society that idealizes and gives preferential treatment to the past in comparison to the present. But Tony’s simulation of the past is simultaneously personal: the world that he constructs through Hetton does not subscribe to the popular preferences of his society.

Waugh’s rendering of nostalgia, set up in Tony’s reverence for Hetton Abbey and its backdrop, is twofold. In a world in which architecture is a means of connecting to the past, the first and more obvious nostalgia is focused on space and place. Within backward-oriented Britain, Tony’s maintenance of Hetton Abbey and its interior is an individual attempt to reconnect with a history that is forever lost—an “emotional pain that Tony cannot articulate” that emerges in his personal feelings of nostalgia rather than in speech or actions (Gorra 211). And in his attempt to articulate his desire for the past by preserving Hetton in its outmoded Gothic style, Tony divorces himself from the chance to live in the present and instead constructs a life in which he is contained “like a fossil in his bedroom, still crammed with the unbroken relics of his childhood” (Slater 49).

Tony cannot escape from his sense of frozenness, but this fossilization is self-imposed. He is not forced to live in Hetton; rather, he chooses to remain at the family estate while his wife purchases and moves into an apartment in London. Since Hetton is Tony’s childhood home, his decision to remain on the country estate, rather than reside with his wife in a city flat, allows him to remain in the same physical and mental space that he occupied as a child; this is a sign that he looks backward toward his personal and

familial pasts as places of comfort. His childlike state of existence within the family home is preferable to beginning a new, adult life in a flat because he can control—or maintain—his already-familiar surroundings.

Hetton's structure points simultaneously backward, to the desire for a romanticized past, and forward, to a similarly idyllic future that, to a certain extent, mirrors the past. The house's structure also traps Tony in its simulation of history and its lack of motion; by immersing himself in Hetton's backward-looking space, he perpetuates his own arrested development—staying, childlike, with the relics of his past; for as long as Hetton continues to stand, he can remain comfortably static inside.

Tony's domestic nostalgia appears in more than Hetton's exterior alone: the home's out-of-date façade houses constant and readily apparent relics of the past through the names of its rooms. Hetton's Gothic-Arthurian interior is as far from post-war vogue as its Gothic shell, and its departure from popular nostalgic obsession (in favor of Tony's personal variety of nostalgia) is overwhelmingly apparent within its interior: each room in the house has a name, labeled in Gothic text that has been “collected” from Arthurian legends—prototypical British mythology. Rooms' names include Morgan le Fay (which is “not in perfect repair,” despite the Lasts' efforts), Guinevere (his wife Brenda's room), and Galahad (Tony's own room) (13). And yet Tony's nostalgia, as evidenced by the interior and exterior spaces of Hetton, is not merely a method of participating in his social environment, but is instead a pathological obsession. Overwhelming desire for control over his environment shifts Tony's nostalgia from the social norm to such a pathological status. Unable to merely adopt the architectural façades of the past like other British citizens, Tony's nostalgic attention to the house and its inherent reverence for mythology,

literally inscribed within the house's structure, allows him to organize and re-construct the national and familial pasts that Hetton's referential construction evokes.

Furthermore, they allow him to live within the confines of familial and national nostalgia even as he goes about his everyday life. It is this overwhelming desire to physically occupy the spaces of the past that indicate on aspect of Tony's extreme psychological state.

But Tony's pathological nostalgia is not limited to Hetton's architectural space; Waugh's second rendering of nostalgia is based in emotions. George McCartney notes that much "like the decorative dado and molding of an earlier age [the Lasts'] personal and family loyalties are treated as the remnants of a nostalgic but inconvenient interior design better covered and put out of sight" (137). Within Hetton's architectural space, its occupants attempt (and fail) to preserve outdated feelings for one another, remnants of an unredeemable past. The Last family's connections to one another are lukewarm, at best; though Tony has emotional ties to his son, John Andrew, and Brenda, his wife, they are rarely together as a family; Brenda spends most of her time in the city, and Tony rarely leaves Hetton. Yet Tony preserves his dream or illusion of a functioning, healthy family despite his marital relations that consist of "domestic playfulness" at their most intimate moments (16). Waugh reveals his characters' participation in acts of emotional nostalgia through their contact with child characters, whose presences and interactions with the adult world expose the constructedness and ultimate failure of an artificially-rendered past.

Extreme attachment to and desire for the nostalgic past, both spatially and emotionally, control Tony's life. His actions—as opposed to his feelings alone—revolve

around the preservation of failing system, despite evidence of nostalgia's weakness. The problem with both foci of Tony's nostalgia—space/place and emotional—is that they reveal their artificiality by failing to live up to their promises. Hetton's remodeling in the 1860s has transformed it from a place that was “formerly one of the notable houses of the county” into a structure that does not appeal to the British public—moving Hetton even farther from the possibility of regaining the cultural appeal that Tony so desperately desires (12). The interior of the house also seems to resist human ability to live within the trappings of the past; Tony plans to remodel the house because the interior is “not altogether amenable to modern ideas of comfort,” and the room called Galahad is so uncomfortable that, as Tony's wife Brenda notices, “No one who sleeps there ever comes again—the bed's agony” (12, 23). And Tony's emotional nostalgia, seen in his sentimentality and nostalgic treatment of others, collapses in the novel's tragedies. He and his wife, Brenda, undergo separation and the beginning stages of divorce; their son, John Andrew, dies in a horse-related accident; and Tony himself is forever separated from his beloved estate after a journey to South America goes wildly awry. These events make it impossible for Tony to maintain his illusion of a stable, comfortable home environment, both spatially and emotionally. Waugh does not allow Tony to maintain his nostalgic complacency by means of retaining a solid connection with the people and places that surround him—instead, these very connections highlight how his nostalgia fails him.

But the failure of Tony's nostalgia does not occur spontaneously. Instead, it is gradually set in motion through his interactions and relationships with children, who play catalytic roles in Tony's life. The two relationships that most disrupt his complacency

are those that he has with John Andrew and a pseudo-niece named Winnie. John Andrew is, by far, the more prevalent of the two characters and is more immediately connected to Tony's construction of nostalgia. As Tony's son, he lives in the same space that Tony occupies and constructs, simultaneously occupying his father's simulation of the past. Tony also expresses an expectation that John Andrew will continue his efforts to preserve the past by maintaining his desire to "reinstatate" Hetton in Britain's popular opinion—an investment through which Tony can rest easily, knowing that the future of the family will continue to revere the history that he prizes.

John Andrew's unexpected death, then, is a critical hit to Tony's notions of security. It is this first incident that begins to change his relationship with nostalgia and its objects and reveals the importance of the child in relationship to nostalgia within *A Handful of Dust*. The setting of the boy's death is especially crucial to the beginning of the estate's disintegration as a nostalgic fortress: the accident that ends John Andrew's life takes place during a foxhunt on Hetton's estate. This foxhunt highlights the here-clear division of child and adult: John Andrew, a young boy, is allowed to go foxhunting, an adult event that is inappropriate for a child that requires constant supervision from a nanny. The end result of the hunt is an accident in which John Andrew is struck and killed by another rider's horse—a sort of punishment for his transgression from age-appropriate activity. Since John Andrew is Tony and Brenda's only child, the future of Last nostalgia is jeopardized by his abrupt death: if Tony dies before the estate is returned to its rightful place in British opinion, there will be no one left in the Last line to preserve Hetton. This is a threat to Tony's physical and mental constructions of lasting

nostalgia—but not an immediate death knell, since Tony is still relatively youthful and can still hole himself up within Hetton’s comforting space.

But Waugh’s destruction of Tony’s nostalgia is not complete without eliminating his emotionally-based illusions: those that allow him to maintain a comfortable façade of family unity and solidity. Tony’s family is in the process of dissolving around him: John Andrew is gone, and as shocking as the loss is for Tony, he predicts, “‘It’s going to be so much worse for Brenda. You see she’d got nothing else, much, except John. I’ve got her, and I love the house . . . but with Brenda John always came first naturally’” (105). But even this understanding of Brenda is a delusion—his wife has been emotionally withdrawn from both Tony and their child for much of the novel. John Andrew’s death provides Brenda with the realization that “‘without offspring their marriage is pointless,’” and this is a strong enough impetus for her to ask Tony for a divorce (McCartney 151). With the loss of Brenda and John Andrew, Tony can have no more illusions about the state of his emotional relationships. But he still has Hetton.

The problem of the divorce is the entry point for the second critical child. Tony still clings to the last vestiges of his emotional nostalgia, allowing Brenda to appear as plaintiff in the divorce case despite her infidelity. In order to provide the court with evidence for a divorce, Tony and his lawyers stage a simulation of infidelity, renting a suite at a seaside hotel for Tony to carry on the performance of an affair. But the woman with whom Tony chooses to engage in this deception, Milly, brings her eight-year-old daughter, Winnie, with them to the seaside resort—much to the surprise of Tony, the hotel’s reception clerk, and the detectives that have been hired to find proof of Tony’s unfaithfulness. Winnie’s presence complicates the simulation of infidelity, as one of the

detectives notices: “I don’t like the look of this case. Most irregular. Sets a nasty, respectable note bringing a kid into it” (130). And illusion is much more important than reality: a lawyer recalls, ““Lately we had a particularly delicate case involving a man of very rigid morality and a certain diffidence. In the end his own wife consented to go with him and supply the evidence. She wore a red wig. It was quite successful”” (125). But Winnie’s presence spoils the “red wig” of the affair by giving it the illusion of normality and a familial context, rather than an image of torrid spousal deviance.

Winnie’s presence is not itself nostalgic, but has several considerable effects on Tony. The first of these is that she provides grounds for Tony to solidify what he had not realized to be a slipping hold on Hetton. After his unsuccessful stay at the seaside hotel, Tony discovers that Brenda has increased the amount of alimony she desires; going through with the divorce as planned would force Tony to sell Hetton in order to pay the large sum that she demands. So it seems that the child assists Tony; by ruining the façade of infidelity, Tony can keep the nostalgic environment that he has cultivated. Winnie has inadvertently allowed Tony to maintain possession of his estate and the remains of its soothing connection to an imagined past.

However, Waugh will not allow Tony to escape from his fate. His realization of Brenda’s betrayal, in both her own infidelity and her demands for what essentially comprises the loss of his estate, is a blow that shatters his nostalgic ecstasy: “His mind had suddenly become clearer on many points that had puzzled him. A whole Gothic world had come to grief...there was now no armor glittering through the forest glades, no embroidered feet on the green sward; the cream and dappled unicorns had fled...” (146). His realization that Brenda plans to forcibly vacate him from the home that he loves

strips his emotional connection to both Brenda, who has betrayed him, and Hetton, which becomes, through Brenda's eyes, valued through its monetary potential, rather than the romanticized history to which it points. Furthermore, he sees his nostalgia for what it is, and "the common literary motif of the deceptive contrast between appearance and reality receives an ironic modification...behind the facade is not reality but nothing"—a perfect example of Baudrillard's hyperreality (Ward 687). Behind Tony's belief of a happy, functioning family, there is no true emotional tie. The Last's marriage, previously characterized by the passionless façade of "domestic playfulness" and affection, is, through Brenda's divorce, revealed to be nothing, and Tony's vision of a mythological Hetton as home for ongoing nostalgia is shattered.

Tony's nostalgic *weltanschauung* begins its downward spiral through the death of his child within the property that he loves so dearly. Through this re-rendering of his estate, Last undergoes a final sense of "betrayal and dispossession"—both from Brenda, who reveals the absence of genuine investment in the family, and from Hetton, which is no longer a space that can maintain the illusion of an idealized past (Stannard 355). The largest betrayal is John Andrew's death itself; Hetton, which Tony has cultivated as a safe and comfortable space, is not truly safe for his son, who represented a future of continued nostalgia. And without Brenda, he has little chance of producing another heir that will continue the Lasts' constructive project after Tony's death.

This final realization of Hetton's falsely preserving nature instigates Tony to break away from his formerly nurturing space and travel to South America, where he will later die. Tony's failure to return to England does not end Waugh's focus on Hetton and its nostalgic nature. Tony's brother, Richard Last, inherits the estate, but traces of Tony



remain in an inscribed stone memorial that commemorates “Anthony Last of Hetton, Explorer” (213). Tony Last is forever tied to Hetton in this stone, even though he is not present on the estate—or even in England—in body. Teddy, Richard Last’s son, similarly continues to tie Tony to Hetton’s estate through his own unwitting continuation of nostalgia. Teddy chooses to live in Galahad, the “unlivable” room that drove away guests, and exhibits an overwhelming love for his own writing of history in his desire to “one day...restore Hetton to the glory that it had enjoyed in the days of his cousin Tony” (214). In this closing line, Teddy chooses to install Tony as a nostalgic figure within the confines of his former estate and inscribes himself, Teddy, as the true inheritor of the overwriting, reminiscent nostalgia that characterized Tony’s occupation of Hetton. Yet he remains oblivious to the fact that his vision of the past is wholly constructed.

Teddy has no real frame of reference for what has previously happened or what really existed, apart from what he imagines to be a glorious past. Thus he has already fallen into the same illusion-filled romanticization of history that his uncle occupied. Together, the memorial stone and Teddy’s dream for the future bind Tony into the mythical familial past that Tony worked to maintain during his lifetime. But even Teddy’s return to nostalgia hints at larger problems. Whether Teddy’s attempts to reconstruct the house’s physical and symbolic greatness will have eventual success is unsure; so far, such attempts have been fruitless. And with the inheritance of a romantic longing for a past that never existed, Teddy’s future as a keeper of Tony’s legacy seems destined for disappointment.

Evelyn Waugh’s vision of nostalgia in *A Handful of Dust* is complex and intentionally disappointing. Tony lives in a hyperreal environment that fosters his

visualization of an ideal future that is identical to the past. But the romanticized reality that Tony envisions is intensely personal, rather than a vision shared by the rest of his environment or culture—a trait of reminiscent nostalgia. Finally, Tony’s nostalgia is monomaniacal, a singular obsession that consumes his thoughts and actions, which revolve around Hetton and its occupants. So through Tony, Waugh combines elements of Baudrillard’s (invisible) cultural nostalgia and longing for the good old days with the overwhelmingly intense psychological effects of medical nostalgia.

But Waugh’s vision of nostalgia does not remain stable; though Tony Last begins the novel in stasis, the novel’s children act as catalytic forces, disrupting his constructed worlds and instigating change through their presences and actions. Though Waugh chooses to emphasize, rather than question, the divisions between children and adults, children—specifically John Andrew and Winnie—connect with and influence adult Tony by means of nostalgia, constantly pushing him out of his hyperreal world until it collapses and leaves him without support. John Andrew and Winnie may not be harbingers or vessels of nostalgia; nor are they overtly major characters. But by influencing and altering the course of Tony Last’s life and feelings, they represent a future that outwits even the most carefully-maintained nostalgia.

*A Handful of Dust* uses a narrative that is comparatively traditional, when viewed alongside *The Waves* and *The Apes of God*; yet its use of the child is not at all traditional. Children are, rather than merely representational characters, devices used to instigate and highlight the failure of nostalgia in Tony Last’s life. They cannot heal emotional wounds or medicate Tony’s pathological personality; nor can they protect or preserve adherents to nostalgic belief. Waugh’s narrative posits that because children like John Andrew or

Teddy Last cannot recuperate what Tony has lost, Tony's efforts and sacrifices become essentially meaningless: they do not preserve the past, and only serve to highlight the shifting and forward momentum of the future.

## CHAPTER III

SEPARATION STORIES: *THE WAVES*

Three years prior to Waugh's description of the dismal affects of nostalgia on individual life, Virginia Woolf had published a novel called *The Waves*. In stark contrast to Waugh's popular style, *The Waves* was overwhelmingly avant-garde: in Woolf's words, an "entirely new kind of book" that would later be seen as her most experimental novel (*Letters* 34). Woolf had already been extremely active during the interwar period, publishing five novels, including *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To The Lighthouse* (1927), and *Orlando* (1928), as well as numerous essays and nonfiction books, between 1919 and 1939. Her membership in the Bloomsbury Group fostered this creativity, putting her in frequent association with modernist painters, literary critics, fellow writers (including E.M. Forster and Lytton Strachey), and economist John Maynard Keynes, for good measure. Woolf's depictions of the interactions between children and nostalgia in *The Waves* are much more complex than Evelyn Waugh's seemingly uniform vision of children as catalysts of nostalgic epiphany and failure in *A Handful of Dust*.

By the time that *The Waves* was published, Woolf had already written a children's story called *Nurse Lugton's Curtain*—the story had been found in the manuscript for *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), but was not published until 1965 (Hodgkins 355). Though the existence of *Nurse Lugton's Curtain* shows Woolf's contact with and awareness of children in the real world, like Waugh, any singular connection of autobiographical or direct correlation between Woolf's fiction and personal life, at least in this regard, would be a mistake. Instead, Woolf's depiction of children is an aspect of her play with narrative, an experiment in new forms of narrative voice. In essays such as "Mr. Bennett

and Mrs. Brown” (1924) and “Modern Fiction” (1924) clarified that the priority of her novels was character portrayal and development—and these characters could range from children to adults (Fand 49). But Woolf noted that character construction was often obscured by vagueness that she witnessed in her contemporaries’ fiction. Her prescription to counteract this vagueness was an attention to the psychology of individual characters. She expressed that an author must “have the courage to say that what interests him is no longer ‘this’ but ‘that’: out of ‘that’ alone he must construct his work. For the moderns ‘that’, the point of interest, lies very likely in the dark places of psychology” (“Modern Fiction” 108). In other words, an author must identify and adopt “that” which is unfamiliar and able to be explored—figures that are individuals in their own right, with minds and thoughts able to be explored in the author’s writing. And in *The Waves*, “children’s” voices highlight a lack of fixity and departure from Victorian modes of narration and voice—adopting an unfamiliar mode to explore psychology and stretch the boundaries of literature.

To understand the importance of psychology in relation to both children and nostalgia in *The Waves*, it is important to first explain one major experimental aspect of Woolf’s novel: nontraditional narration. Between each section of the “plot,” Woolf inserts an interpolated section (which she called “interludes”) without a known narrator; these sections are distinguished from “plot” sections, which employ disembodied voices as narrators (qtd. in Stewart 425). There are six narrating voices, each of which represents a single person (Jinny, Susan, Rhoda, Bernard, Louis, or Neville). The voices alternate their individual narration, which is indicated in the text as follows:

“Look at the house,” said Jinny, “with all its windows white with blinds.”

“Cold water begins to run from the scullery tap,” said  
Rhoda, “over the mackerel in the bowl.” (10)

Because Woolf’s formal narration is so complex, throughout my discussion of *The Waves* I will refer to the six narrators as “narrators,” “characters,” and “voices”—“narrators” and “voices” will refer to the disembodied speakers that narrate their thoughts, feelings, and observations. “Characters,” on the other hand, will refer to the physical presences of the six figures when they are mentioned by a narrating voice.

Voices and characters come together progressively throughout the novel, beginning as children and gradually aging from child to young adult to middle age to old age over the course of the novel. This allows each voice a variety of opportunities to develop and transmit their perspectives of the other characters. The voices are truly individuals, with unequal amounts of emphasis put on each figure: of the six voices/psychologies, Bernard is clearly the most dominant vocal presence throughout *The Waves*. Woolf’s focus on individual development through words, rather than actions and corporeal description, gives each of the characters a presence more defined by their individual psychology than their physical attributes.

Despite her fascination with individual psychology, Woolf avoided use of her contemporaries’ clinical terminology and jargon; the modernist’s experimentation with voice in *The Waves* focused less on wordplay or the reinvention of vocabulary, but rather manifested itself in her (often abstracted) portrayal of reality (*Imagining Virginia Woolf* 66-71, 169). Maria DiBattista notices that during her writing of *The Waves*, Woolf had been undergoing an evolution in narrative voice; her work, which had begun with a “choric” voice in *Mrs. Dalloway* transformed into “lyric meditation,” which manifested itself in the double nature of reality: the juxtaposition of solid substance and empty space

(*IWW* 73, *Virginia Woolf's Major Novels* 165-166). Throughout her writing, by “suspending us [readers] in incertitude” through “detours, self-interruptions, and self-questionings” Woolf resists definitively choosing “solid,” concrete ideas (represented in *The Waves* by clearly-defined events and occurrences), which “grant[s] the authorial self more latitude, but also potentially making it more isolated from its kind;” simultaneously, DiBattista notices, her narrative voice threatens to be lost in the “empty space” of dreamscapes and individual character psychology (*IWW* 84). This play of spaces, psychology, and solid forms will come into play throughout the novel’s structure and plot.

Crucial to the psychology that dominates *The Waves* are the occurrences of microevents, a term that Roxanne J. Fand creates and defines in *The Dialogic Self*. Microevents are seemingly insignificant or minor incidents that have more influence and larger effects than they might initially seem to deserve. Several moments in *The Waves* set up and perpetuate the overwhelming sense of nostalgia that each of the six voices will express. The major microevents that serve such a function are Bernard and Susan’s discovery of Elvedon and the kiss that Jinny gives Louis—events that both occur in the early pages of the novel, when the characters are young children. Since the root of Woolf’s character development occurs during the characters’ childhood, children then become crucial figures in the novel.

But Woolf’s vision of children and childhood defies an easy analysis. *The Waves* begins in a somewhat ambiguous state: the six narrating characters appear, through the rendering of their voices, as children. But the opening of Woolf’s novel plays with an ambiguity between child and adult. During their first appearances, the six voices speak

with language, logic, and concepts that are much too advanced for their young (nursery school) age, as both Peter Coveney and Hope Howell Hodgkins have noted (Coveney 314, Hodgkins 357). Near the beginning of the novel, Bernard observes, “Now the cock crows like a spurt of hard, red water in the white tide” (*Waves* 10). This sexual imagery is incongruent with Bernard’s obvious sexual immaturity and ostensible naiveté as a nursery-aged child; the child-Bernard should not be able to understand or conceive of the double-entendre of words such as “cocks” and “white tides” in relation to one another. In addition to extremely imagistic speech and its sometimes overly-mature implications, vocabulary itself becomes an age-confusing factor. As the voices travel away from home for public schooling, they often use polysyllabic words quite fluently; during her first day away from home, at school, Susan claims, “All here [at school] is false; all is meretricious” (33). Susan’s vocabulary and overall observation can hardly be expected from a girl that has only recently left the nursery; her judgment is quick, succinct, and all-encompassing—traits of more a more mature mind. Though the voices’ bodies may be that of children, their psychological states are adult, or, at the very least, have outstanding adult characteristics.

The introduction of ambiguously-aged characters sets up a mind/body conflict as well as a lack of clear age distinction, both of which will pervade the remainder of the novel. Though several of the narrators later state their ages specifically, the first sections highlight the odd tension of age determined by physical appearances versus apparent age from conceptual complexity. This concept of a multi-faceted body will come into play again at the end of the novel, when Bernard talks of his pain, then asks himself, ““which pain?” referring to the two sides of my body, as I came downstairs, making a purely



physical statement” (263). The psyche and the body are able to function and experience events independently, and thus characters can (and do) exist in a state that cannot completely be defined, as their childhood states suggest.

These divergences from “traditional” understandings of children and childhood come to light in the children’s psychology and transmitted visions of the world around them. The narrators’ age-related ambiguity only seems to apply to their individual and group mentalities and voices. Throughout the duration of their (self-acknowledged) childhood, the voices express a strong awareness of adults as separate from them, the children. Similarly, they view adulthood as a more advanced—or, at the very least, different—state than that which they occupy. This vision of adults comes first in the comprehension of adults as authority figures, individuals who exert power or influence over them in microevents.

The children’s early narration of their interaction with authoritative adults continues the tension set up in the voices’ age/voice disparity. As Bernard and Susan play in the “ringed wood with the wall round it,” they discover the estate of Elvedon (*Waves* 17). When the children look over the wall, they see a lady and several gardeners going about their life on the estate—the woman writes as the gardeners patrol the estate. The wall physically separates the worlds of adult life and children, giving them distinct arenas. Though the children are aware of the wall and can see what exists on the other side, they cannot cross from their side into the realm of the adult world.

Furthermore, the children imagine themselves to be “discoverers of an unknown world” and intruders on this adult life, violating the “hostile country” of adulthood by gazing upon it. The penalty that Bernard imagines for this trespass is, of course, death:

“We shall be shot! We shall be shot like jays and pinned to the wall” (17). But Bernard’s concept of the punishment for trespassing goes beyond mere death; his vision of being pinned to the wall like jays (or, earlier, stoats) involves a public display of the pair’s offense to adulthood. Bernard imagines that he and Susan will be treated like animals that destroy the order and tranquility of domestic spaces and the adult realm because their very presence is a threat to Elvedon’s occupants. The differences, however elusive, between adults and children are significant enough to child-Bernard that he believes that the transgression of space, whether that space is a physical estate or the metaphorical realm of adulthood, is a crime worthy of capital punishment.

The wall has deeper symbolism and danger: it represents the border between childhood and adulthood, and it encloses the space of childhood—implying that the adult world on the other side is much wider and expansive. If Bernard and Susan are caught crossing over this boundary prematurely, their punishment will be permanent attachment to the wall—that is to say, they will be affixed permanently in one static spot, occupying neither the realm of childhood nor able to fully cross into the outside world of adulthood. This static physicality is reiterated in the death that would occur prior to their attachment to the wall. Susan realizes, “If we died here, nobody would bury us”—the children would be denied the finality and closure of burial (17). Instead, as Bernard notes, their death would result in the permanent display of shame on the dividing wall. In this microevent, death becomes the ultimate measure of fixity, permanently anchoring the dead in one undefined, liminal space.

But even with a clear physical division between the children’s world of the woods and Elvedon, which lies beyond the wall, Woolf’s concept of the divide between child-

and adulthood resists fixity. The second microevent that highlights the divide between child- and adulthood—a kiss—is traumatic and again challenges the notion of “child” and “adult” in *The Waves*. Before Susan and Bernard encounter the wall that separates them from Elvedon, four of the six children play outside; Louis and Rhoda each remain separate from the other members of the group, and Louis hides behind a hedge. During their play, Jinny finds Louis and kisses him. This seemingly simple act is invasive and unwanted; though Jinny may have only innocent intentions or complete naiveté, Louis’s reaction and realization (“All is shattered”) indicate that he has experienced a kind of trauma—no longer can he hope to remain in a permanent state of childhood innocence and safety (13). His tranquility and naiveté—indeed, his entire understanding of the world—has been shattered, permanently destroyed and forever unobtainable—through the enforcement of an “adult” activity on his body. After the kiss, the loss of unrealized childhood innocence is foreshadowed, and the onset of sexual and physical maturity (and with it, leaving home) becomes inevitable.

The covert kiss is a prelude to the world of sexuality, and the children recognize sexuality, in turn, as a marker of adulthood. The artificiality of the children’s gateway is clearer later, when a second, different, kiss occurs. Susan, who has witnessed Jinny’s virtual attack on Louis, similarly witnesses two servants kissing: “He was blind as a bull, and she swooned in anguish, only little veins streaking her white cheeks red” (25). This vision of adult sexuality is hardly titillating—and the woman’s anguish is akin to Louis’s agonized realization of a “shattered” world. Like the children’s kiss, the servants’ contact is intended to be a covert interaction; like the children’s kiss, the act itself is a transgression seen by a third party.

Not only has Jinny transgressed by invading Louis's physical space, but she has also violated the boundaries of adulthood in her prematurely sexual act, highlighted in the later image of the servants' affair. In both cases, kisses are a form of transgression; Jinny's forced kiss of Louis and the observation of two servants' illicit romantic conduct, which is similarly pointed out as troublesome through the couple's blindness—inability to see—and swooning—lack of control over the body. Furthermore, Susan has inadvertently transgressed in both cases by witnessing private moments of intimacy between two people—a gaze that punishes her by causing her trauma that will continue to follow her throughout her narration in *The Waves*. Yet the children's actions are not equivalent to the servants' kiss; the female servant's anguish is a complicit anguish, and Susan is far more traumatized by the children's interaction than the adults'. The children's passions, and the fascination and desire for elements of adulthood are not fulfilled in Louis and Jinny's kiss; the children do not transform into adults through the action, and instead progress through their lives at the same rate as the other voices.

Patrick McGee argues, "Woolf's relation to her characters [in *The Waves*] is one of complete detachment and impersonal dissociation" (635). This dissociation is clear in her unclear picture of children. Establishing specific parameters for "child" is not as important as defining what a child is not: that is to say, an adult. Woolf's enforcement of the child/adult division is clear, if her motivation for doing so may at first seem clouded. The child-voices acknowledge punitive ability, authority, and sexuality as markers of adulthood, and microevents confirm this divide. The kiss sets up a children's simulation of adult life that fails to successfully mask or transform the children. In addition, the discovery of Elvedon reveals the child-voices' realization of the vague threat behind

trespassing into the realm of adulthood or escaping the walled woods of childhood too soon as well as the potential consequences of such actions. But this division between child and adult is crucial to Woolf's construction of the voices' nostalgia. The children's kiss in particular will be of special significance through the remainder of the novel: the simple covert action ties the six narrators together through its effects and becomes a recurring theme/memory in the narrators' consciousness. Because the childhood kiss influences the narrators' later decision-making and emotions, it becomes a key to the novel's participation and evolution in nostalgia.

In general, Woolf's nostalgia is fairly easy to locate: it revolves around the child/adult division, as the voices look backward toward the people and events of their childhood. But Woolf's deeper conception of nostalgia is far more complex. Near the end of the novel, as an elderly man, Bernard says,

[I]n order to make you understand, to give you my life, I must tell you a story—and there are so many, and so many—stories of childhood, stories of school, love, marriage, death, and so on; and none of them are true. Yet like children we tell each other stories...How tired I am of stories, how tired I am of phrases that come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground! (238)

He reveals a key aspect of nostalgia in *The Waves*: the voices access the past through the stories they tell themselves—stories that are inherently untrue, reminiscently constructed to end neatly “with all their feet on the ground.” These stories of the (nostalgic) past, which come through the guise of memory, are primarily accessed through triggers—memories of past events with current resonance in the characters' lives. These memories are most often triggered when the six voices come together in a group setting; though

they may also occur when the voices are apart, their most potent effects come when the characters are in a shared space, interacting with one another.

The first major trigger occurs when the group reunites as young adults (“the oldest is not yet twenty-five”) (124). They gather to say goodbye to a seventh (non-narrating) character—Percival, a childhood friend who is about to travel to India. Being in the presence of the other voices triggers potent memories for each of the voices: Bernard recalls being bathed by their caregiver, Mrs. Constable, and seeing the grounds at Elvedon; Susan remembers the kisses she witnessed; Jinny, Louis, and Rhoda evoke images of their nursery and school days; and Neville remembers his past isolation from the other characters (123-126). Yet each of these memories is, in reality, a story, however brief—an attempt that the six voices make in order to combat the impossibility of reentering the past. The stories may not construct a fully believable world, but instead allow the characters to construct positive images of what could have been, had the past been altered.

This scene is also a notable introduction to nostalgia in its focus around Percival. Percival never appears in *The Waves* except by means of the other characters’ narration and recollection, which throws his real presence—if he indeed has one—into question. Gabrielle McIntire notices, “Percival functions for the six other characters as an idealized, largely imaginary figure; he is narratable, but he never tells his own story” (39). Percival’s lack of concrete presence means that he can be infinitely manipulated—and the voices take advantage of this opportunity, whether or not they intend to do so. Each voice “adores and shamelessly apotheosizes” Percival—Neville’s early description of the boy on a playing field indicates the extent of the reverence that he and the other

characters have for the non-narrator: “Look now, how everybody follows Percival...His magnificence is that of some mediaeval commander...Look at us trooping after him, his faithful servants, to be shot like sheep, for he will certainly attempt some forlorn enterprise and die in battle” (McIntire 39, *Waves* 37). This image is amazingly prophetic—Percival dies in India soon afterward.

But Percival’s death is only the beginning of his real significance: the voices return to their memories of Percival throughout the novel, and Percival becomes the ultimate embodiment of nostalgia and nostalgic authority. Louis projects Percival as a figure of infinite possibility, believing that he “would have been happier to have been born without a destiny...like Percival, whom I most admire” (201). Neville furthermore imagines the circumstances of his friend’s death: “The flashing trees and white rails went up in a shower. There was a surge; a drumming in his ears. Then the blow; the world crashed; he breathed heavily. He died where he fell” (151). Neville was not present at Percival’s death, so he cannot know the exact details and feelings that Percival experienced as he died. His life is inaccessible, but this inaccessibility allows the voices to construct his life as they wish to perceive or remember it.

This memory has affective ties to the microevents that have instilled themselves into the permanent consciousness of the voices. Even as a middle-aged adult, Susan recalls her childhood memories and traumas—in particular, Jinny and Louis’s kiss and the events at Elvedon (190). She likewise remembers a romanticized “Percival who loved me,” a surprising revelation that Percival himself never confirmed (192). Bernard similarly romanticizes what Percival would have been, had he not died: “He would have done justice. He would have protected. About the age of forty he would have shocked

the authorities” (243). Bernard’s “would haves” echo Neville’s earlier iteration that “if someone had but said: ‘Wait’: had pulled the strap three holes tighter—he would have done justice for fifty years, and sat in Court and ridden alone at the head of troops and denounced some monstrous tyranny, and come back to us” (152). The voices’ investment and participation in the hypothetical mythology highlights the subjectivity, repetition, and lack of original source material behind their creation of Percival-the-figure.

For the voices, Percival becomes a figure of emotional and historical investment—a person who loved and would have challenged authority figures, a story of rebellion and a life that could have been. The voices’ stories and narrations about their childhood friend look backward in an attempt to move forward. Yet these stories of Percival’s life (had he not died) and symbolic constructions are not satisfactory: Bernard admits at the end of the novel that “no lullaby has ever occurred to me capable of singing him to rest” (243). Bernard and the other characters are unable to let go of their visions of a living Percival, a reality from which, like their own childhoods, they have been forever removed.

But these stories of Percival offer a stark contrast to the voices’ experience with microevents. Both readers and the narrators have given thorough descriptions of events that “actually” occurred, complete with the faceted images, emotions, and descriptions provided by each of the voices. The kiss and Elvedon are troublesome memories since they are, to some extent, “fixed” in narration, and mediated prior to the moments in which they are recalled. Since readers have no knowledge of Percival on his own terms, untinted by individual associations, stories, and memories, the non-narrating character



cannot be fixed. He is a nostalgic memory, a piece of the past that cannot be regained by the voices or claimed by readers. It is impossible to know the “reality” of Percival, and Bernard’s late commentary about stories highlights the lack of truth. Similarly, the stories in *The Waves*—the memories, interactions, and characters themselves—are subjective and unknowable in unmediated form, just as the past. But this will not stop the voices or readers from attempting to reconstruct what they will never really know.

Though Woolf’s construction of nostalgia and children resist concrete placement, they offer several important observations and ideas of the nature between childhood, adulthood, and nostalgic memory. Woolf constructs characters that, even in their early years, do not totally subscribe to any “traditional” understanding of children. They are not fixed figures; instead, they are simultaneously psychologically complex and physically mundane, presenting a lack of unison between mind and body. And childhood itself is something ambiguous, rather than a concrete, traceable progression from child to adult. The divider floats between child- and adulthood with no set location; just as Woolf’s characters are unfixed in time and space, so is the limit that divides children and adults—if there even is one. Therefore children are impossible to define strictly, and Woolf either avoids or purposely fails to offer any clear definition or division other than vague sexual and authoritarian disparities.

Nostalgia is similarly complex. Childhood is crucial to this fabrication of nostalgia because all of the voices look backward, toward Percival and the microevents that have been crucial to their relationships with one another and their perspectives of the world around them. Woolf’s nostalgia in *The Waves* is primarily reminiscent, relying on individual perception, analysis, and recreation through story-telling, rather than an

overwhelming cultural predisposition. The characters rely on their personal interactions, relationships, and friendships to develop a nostalgic perspective. Nostalgia in the context of *The Waves* is primarily based in looking backward; and here is where Woolf's unique perspective lies. None of her voices seem to benefit from this nostalgia, even temporarily, and they all seem to be aware of their nostalgic impulses (to varying extents).

Thus it seems that the narrators in the novel are victims of both reminiscent nostalgia and medical nostalgia, a “mania of longing” for a past that cannot be changed—a past in which they are children, a past in which Percival lives, and a past that they inevitably return to in their memories of microevents. The narrator/sufferers cling to ties with one another—in the last pages of the novel, Bernard expresses, “I have been talking of Bernard, Neville, Jinny, Susan, Rhoda and Louis. Am I all of them? Am I one and distinct? I do not know. We sat here together. But now Percival is dead, and Rhoda is dead; we are divided; we are not here. Yet I cannot find any obstacle separating us” (288). Memories cannot placate or heal any of the voices, but rather cause pain by revealing the unattainability of the past. Unity, it seems, is what Bernard perceives as a cure for the pain of his nostalgia—and the obstacle that divides the voices in *The Waves* is voices' individual renderings of nostalgia, from seeds planted in them when they were children.

It is significant that these roots begin in the voices' childhood—and that the voices themselves begin their presence in the novel as children. Their growth and progression, alongside their evolving senses and interpretations of memory, present them as something other than—or not solely—children. Rather, they become, for Woolf, the

means of developing part of her experimental narrative technique, and thus the overall voice of her novel. Children in *The Waves* represent not solely (or even primarily) genuine children, but are instead symbols for the inability to regain and re-access the past. Similarly, through her manipulation of voices, narrative, and psychology, Woolf suggests that the accepted, “traditional” sense of narrative accepted by writers and readers of the past is no longer satisfactory or able to stand on its own: art, like children, must move forward and progress to new states of existence.

## CHAPTER IV

POSING AND POSITIONING IN *THE APES OF GOD*

Offering an alternative to Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Group was (Percy) Wyndham Lewis. Lewis's position in relation to contemporary understandings of modernism is complicated; his espousal of British fascism during the interwar period, resulting in the publication of the pro-Hitler text *Hitler* in 1931, renders him a troublesome figure for modern scholars even though Lewis would later revoke the book in 1939's *The Hitler Cult*. As a result, the extremely prolific author and painter has until recently been virtually omitted from the modernist canon.

Despite this historical and canonical revision, Lewis's role as a modernist is unmistakable: in 1912, Lewis had briefly joined the Omega Workshop, an avant-garde art collective that contained members of the Bloomsbury Group—specifically Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell, and Roger Fry (O'Keeffe 125). But Lewis believed that the group undervalued his work, and a disagreement between Fry and Lewis led to the latter's severance from the group, a highly public feud, and Lewis's formation of the Rebel Arts Center in 1914 (126, 147). By 1930, Lewis had essentially founded his own branch of modernism, called Vorticism—a movement that famously included canonical modernist Ezra Pound—and created two magazines: *BLAST*, which published 2 issues in 1914-15, and *The Enemy*, which ran from 1927-29. He adopted “The Enemy” as his own nickname and persona: derisive polemics concerning the political world combined with outspoken contention with other modernist individuals and movements isolated him from Britain's larger avant-garde movement (Edwards 303).

Lewis wrote *The Apes of God* while he was in the period of “The Enemy,” after a nearly decade-long hiatus from publishing creative work (Edwards 3). The book became, then, an overtly political, satirical critique of British life and art in the form of a novel. The title itself was immediately confrontational: Lewis’s term “Apes of God” referred to typically rich dilettantes who considered themselves artists, but were instead halfhearted imitators of artists (“God”)—and, as Paul Edwards notes, competed for studio space and customers with the artists that they would have otherwise patronized (343). Apes were unwilling and unable to truly devote their intellects and lives to that art, living instead in an “artificial world of carefully fostered self-esteem” and furthering the cause of “amateurisation,” which Lewis had previously decried in a collection of aesthetic-based essays called *The Caliph’s Design* (Apes 131). Bloomsbury, of course, was part of this Apehood. Indeed, Lewis’s purpose of creating a satiric commentary through the novel explains, at least in part, the lack of a clear-cut, overriding plot in *The Apes of God*. Rather than providing a strict, clear narrative, Lewis arranges a sort of assemblage of scenes, introducing so many characters in such a short span of time that it becomes difficult to distinguish between them. It is important to note here that the figures in the novel corresponded to real people in the world of modernist Britain; the Apes were a direct, overt attack on individuals.

In the “assemblage” of *The Apes of God* Lewis constructs a web-like environment in which nostalgia and children each have a variety of manifestations that connect and weave through one another. The complicated relationship is the product of Lewis’s nontraditional development of childhood, a construction that is more complicated than those of Waugh’s straightforward child-figures and even Woolf’s depictions of children

with adult voices. Also unlike the works by Woolf and Waugh, Lewis's novel is not concerned with the corporeal reality of pre-adolescent children so much as the state of childishness or the living conditions of childhood that can be applied to a broader age range. Rather, the author studies children as symbols and connections to the future, a future that is inherently political. Children's political ties and implications for the future and nostalgia will appear prominently in Lady Fredigonde's imaginary museum. (Lewis's political beliefs and their manifestations in *The Apes of God* have been extensively documented and explored by Geoffrey Wagner, Paul Edwards, and Jeffrey Meyers, among others. In order to maintain focus on the interplay between nostalgia and children, I will largely skirt the many-faceted constructions of specifically political commentary in favor of a more general political outlook.) And the bodies of adult-children, seen in the novel's Finnian Shaw family, represent a desire to cling to the past and its golden, nostalgic memories. In both Fredigonde's museum and the Finnian Shaw's mansion, the presence of children and childishness will complicate characters' reverence of the past, which opposes the possibilities of the future.

The concept of "child" as a state distinct from adulthood in *The Apes of God* deviates from its equivalents in *A Handful of Dust* and *The Waves* through the absence of children as defined by a physical body and pre-adolescent age. The only children—"proper" that appear in the novel occupy the aforementioned Lady Fredigonde's daydreams—they are not living, breathing children, but are instead figments of her imagination. Since there is an overwhelming absence of "actual" children's bodies, the disconnect between body and mind will be crucial to indicating childishness for Lewis, much like Woolf. But Lewis will also combine Woolf's presentation of "adult" mindsets

within the bodies of pre-adolescents with a reversal of Woolf's child-body/adult-mind juxtaposition. Throughout *The Apes of God*, childhood is either a physical attribute of an adult body or a shifting and complicated state of immaturity that is primarily based in the (sub-standard) mindset or mental capacity of adults. This disparity appears in Woolf's satirical descriptions of characters Dick Whittingdon and Betty Bligh. Betty is "in her features as well as in stature...the four-foot-ten adult-tot in toto" (88). Betty's underdeveloped body renders her a child in body, if an adult in age—its childlike appearance belies her actual maturity. So, though her appearance allows her to pass for a child, Lewis clarifies through his emphasis on her childlike figure exactly the opposite: Betty is not a child, despite the abundance of visible evidence to the contrary.

Dick, on the other hand, is a thirty-six year old army veteran, a "six-foot-two [figure] of brown seasoned manhood" with a "cleft...bull-dog chin so difficult to shave" (33-35). Though Dick has the body of a physically-mature adult, in the presence of his aunt he speaks and acts as a young boy, clumsy "with the action of the refractory child being dragged along by something like its umbilical cord" (37). Dick's action, the passive act of being dragged along against his will like a fetal (and therefore utterly dependent) child, contrasts with the decidedly un-fetal appearance of his body. Though Dick may *appear* to be refractory and child/babylike, he also *appears* to be a mature adult. This seeming contradiction is in keeping with Christopher Lane's observation that Lewis's satire stresses above all externality (787). And indeed, appearances—the outer shells and superficial facets of people and events—are crucial for the development of both Lewis's children and nostalgia—and, on a larger scale, his satire. Fitting this theme, the overlap (or lack of division) between child- and adult-characteristics centers itself in

*appearances*, whether through the physical body or actions of characters like Dick and Betty.

The complexity of adult-childhood divisions in even their minor characters showcases an overall indeterminacy of age within *The Apes of God*—there is no concrete way to distinguish the child from the adult; physical smallness does not necessarily indicate childhood, nor do actions, words, or diminished ability to reason. Thus there is no formula or universal way to definitively determine a “child” from an “adult.” This lack of fixity gives Lewis an overwhelming amount of control as a satirist. His manipulation of language and imagery are crucial in order to establish his authority as the arbiter of (relative) age, its manifestations in individual characters, and its commentary on the figures that display conflicting age traits—alongside his authority pertaining to the novel in its narrative and thematic entirety. Every aspect of the novel is mediated through Lewis’s editorial lens, and readers cannot establish a solid perspective of the novel, its contents, or the varying degrees of childhood without being aware of how the author poses his fictional characters and settings—positioning that is nearly universally derisive. And the novel’s satirical tone eliminates the fictional characters’ potential for readerly sympathy; they cannot be likable or relatable because Lewis shows no likable or relatable facets of their personalities. Through Lewis’s unsympathetic eye, the child- and adult-figures alike are Apes, failed imitators, and Lewis has the final say regarding their Apehood. Inserting himself as the deciding factor in character description and commentary on children will allow Lewis to seamlessly posit himself as the sole expert in both the identification of apery and the revelation of true artistry.



Because the author is the only permissible authority in terms of character and age definition and differentiation, he must also be the arbiter of nostalgia's entrance into *The Apes of God*. Lewis begins to construct the troublesome relationship of adult desires, nostalgia, and children in the novel's prologue. He introduces images of nostalgia by presenting the case of Lady Fredigonde. Fredigonde is an elderly, wealthy woman whose experiences in the form of a daydream will provide a basis of nostalgia and its dangers that are crucial to understandings of the possibilities, threats, and nature of nostalgia throughout the rest of the novel. Lady Fredigonde also entwines nostalgia with images of children and destruction, revealing a connection between an obsession with the past and an anticipation of a violent, disruptive future.

Lewis introduces Lady Fredigonde Follett in the midst of the ritual of composing her appearance, which consists of positioning a reticella-cap upon her carefully-coiffed head. This seemingly mundane action already sets up a practice of looking toward the past as a means of comfort and stability—the old-fashioned reticella-cap, a head covering that was popularized in the 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, is hardly in vogue by the novel's twentieth century setting, and Fredigonde's concern for the hat's proper positioning indicates her wider obsession with the preservation of a carefully-arranged past (OED). Just as the reticella-cap must be arranged perfectly, so must Fredigonde's past history be meticulously arranged and ordered. Furthermore, Fredigonde accessorizes the lace cap with ribbons made from the tartan of her mother's "tribe"—the McAra family (37). These hat-ribbons are literal ties to the past; they connect Fredigonde to her deceased mother and the other bygone (and, with the use of the term "tribe," ostensibly primitive)

relatives in the clan, while situating Fredigonde as the suitably evolved inheritor of ancient family culture and tradition.

The elderly Lady Follett is the last of her clan, and since she has no offspring, her family and its history will die with her—a situation that recalls Tony Last’s experiences in *A Handful of Dust*. But rather than abandoning the site of her family history like Tony, Fredigonde counters this sense of inevitable extinction by imagining ways of preserving herself and her family history, constructing an entirely imaginary future museum in which her reticella-cap with the clan-ribbons is displayed in a case with her name underneath to indicate ownership. She evokes the space of her own imaginary museum as a suitably preservative environment, believing that “there were museums and museums—the Valhalla of Things. (There was no Valhalla of Persons, it was understood)” (23).

Within the Valhalla of Things, Fredigonde’s old-fashioned cap and the history that it represents can continue to be preserved, admired, and recognized even after her death. And since she imagines that her name, “Lady Fredigonde Follett,” will be displayed under the reticella, she will likewise be preserved through history as the once-possessor of the cap. Through the nameplate, future memory of Fredigonde is tied to the cap as securely as its tartan ribbons. Lady Fredigonde Follett’s invisible presence will become an extension of the exhibit as she is remembered and exhibited as the once- and forever possessor of the displayable headpiece. She approves of this preservation: “Let her by all means survive as a cap—there were worse things than that, by Jupiter” (23). Fredigonde harbors no hope for an afterlife, since she denies the Valhalla of Persons, and her body is already decaying, though she takes much effort to preserve what remains of

her ruined, mannequin-like body. She realizes that she will not be able to permanently preserve her body, but she can survive through the memories evoked by physical relics of the past and position herself as a significant aspect of this past by allowing a nonliving—and therefore undying—object to be put on display, locked away in a showcase.

But not even Fredigonde can control what goes on in her own system of nostalgic preservation. When she imagines patrons viewing her cap, she does not experience their reverence for the past. Rather than being inspired to nostalgic reverence through the display of the cap and name, the imaginary visitors fail to take the display seriously. Fredigonde hears “a tone of distinct mockery...in some of the [visitors’] voices. *Fredigonde!* It would appear that the name—yes there was too much chuckling and muttering frankly to be pleasant” (24, original italics). The museumgoers’ lack of respect for the cap, a symbol of her own nostalgia, becomes a direct insult to her person through their attacks on her name. Furthermore, Fredigonde cannot contain the visitors’ reactions and opinions of the space that she has constructed; and since it is her own nostalgic daydream (over which she would theoretically maintain some modicum of control) this indicates a weakness of her nostalgia and its manifestations. The preserved cap in the museum-space is not invulnerable; the protective casing around the cap and her nameplate do not shelter Fredigonde—and through Fredigonde, her mythologized lineage—from being mocked.

The weakness of nostalgia revealed in the patrons’ absent reverence will evolve into a nostalgic failure with the next visitors in the imaginary museum—and with the new group’s entrance, an overt political angle also enters the novel. These visitors consist of a school of children led by a “Red Scout-Master” (24). The children’s entrance is

immediately associated with communist propaganda, as denoted by the Red Scout-Master. And these are threatening politics; less important to Fredigonde than the intricacies of communism is its destructive potential. To add to the insult of the previous patrons' name-mockery, the children continue to disrupt Fredigonde's museum of nostalgia by injuring the museum-space itself: "the little jumping Bolsheviks smash the glasses of the show-cases. A thunder of small fists breaks out, like a crash of kettle-drums" (24-25).

In Fredigonde's imaginary museum, children represent a troublesome future of communist power. Through their destruction of the display cases, they similarly smash her happy construction, in which the past is revered through nostalgically viewing relics of the past. And these are not just any children, but overtly political figures that represent not only personal disillusionment, but also the jeopardy of an entire way of life through communism's opposition to Lewis's (and, assumedly, Fredigonde's) pro-British lifestyle. Adding to their destruction, the children "distribute the expensive headwear swiftly, passing from hand to hand...The Red Scout-Master, arching out his Kiwi calves and protruding his Robin-red-breast, reserves for himself the prize-cap...He tries it on" (25). Fredigonde is powerless to stop the disruption in her nostalgic daydream, and she becomes a fugitive in her own imagination (26). There is much at stake with this destruction, at least for Fredigonde—the children's irreverent, mocking actions shock her within her dreamlike state and destroy her ability to take seriously her name and her desires for permanent preservation (through a cap).

The children's destruction of the display cases and the patrons' mockery of names indicate that Fredigonde fails *twice*: first, the destruction and mockery instigated by

patrons of her imagined museum indicate that Fredigonde is not able to exert extended control over the environment that she constructs. Her desire for eternal recognition as a key figure of the past (and, through this recognition and remembrance, a permanent importance in the history and nostalgia of the future) is likewise a delusion; she cannot force future events or people to conform to her wishes after she is dead. Her nostalgia's first failure comes through its revelation as an illusion; Fredigonde's lack of control over her own vision emphasizes the differences between true control (the "real thing") and the (unattainable) wish for or aping imitation of historical significance. Her personal sense of nostalgia will inevitably fail, and she will not be able to maintain her presence as a notable historical figure.

Furthermore, children and their symbolic investment in the future represent an inevitable vulnerability and destruction of nostalgia in a more widespread environment. Like Waugh, Lewis plays on children's representation of the future, using their symbolism to dismantle the trappings that keep Fredigonde mired in nostalgia. The children's small fists insist on the unsustainability of the perfect, encased world of the imaginary museum as well as the unsustainability of Fredigonde's illusion. The museum inverts her original vision of complacent nostalgia, transforming her dream into a nightmare that, rather than looking toward the future as an arena for her establishment in a revered cultural history, indicates a fearful future: both politically, in which the familiar is transformed into the *bolshevik*; and reminiscently, as children do not revere but rather destroy symbols of a romanticized, illusory past. In this future, Fredigonde cannot be a revered aspect of history, but will instead be mocked and, potentially, forgotten.

Children and nostalgia come together in a slightly different form through the Finnian Shaw family. The Finnian Shaws consist of an entire family of Apes that appears in “Lord Osmund’s Lenten Party,” the twelfth section of the novel (and longest, at over 250 pages). They present Lewis’s most outstanding critique of nostalgic desire in the artistic world. In keeping with Lewis’s critique of London’s Bloomsbury group and its artistic pretensions, Lord Osmund Finnian Shaw, the host of the party, is a satirical rendering of real-life figure Sir Osbert Sitwell, who was Bloomsbury associate (Perrino 89). Lewis’s critique of the Sitwells-via-Finnian Shaws, then, is grounded in the family’s nostalgic obsession with the past, particularly their fixation with their family history.

The Finnian Shaws’ nostalgia revolves around two aspects of familial disconnect from the novel’s sense of the present. The first of these is the family’s overwhelming obsession with the past, particularly the “Nineties”—referring, of course, to the 1890s and Victorianism. The term that Finnian Shaws use to indicate their relationship to the Nineties is “period-prestige”—a term that is incredibly revealing. It indicates the singularity of “period”—there is only *one* period that truly matters, and the closer that the family and their associates can imitate the past, the higher the level of prestige they gain. “Period-prestige” privileges the past over the present (or, heaven forbid, the future) and creates a framework or mold around a history set up as singularly worthy of veneration.

Both the Finnian Shaw home and its occupants fit this model of period-propriety. Lord Osmund’s typical mannerism “combines, with the traditional Irish ‘madness’, every correct minor mania of the post-Ninety aestheticism of the Chelsea English;” his wife, Robinia, is described as a “period-piece...of an entirely devitalized instrument of post-Ninety satisfaction” (367). The Finnian Shaws may occupy a post-Nineties world,

but they still cling to their ties to the Nineties; the use of the term “post-Ninety” implicitly carries a direct connection to 1890 as its very core. Everything in the present, including the family members themselves, appears in terms of its relationship with the past, which asserts a familial desire to reoccupy the Victorian period after it has already passed. The widespread period-obsession also indicates the beginning of the family’s attempts to enforce their own severance from the trappings of reality in favor of the myth of the past.

Even more worrisome than the Finnian Shaws’ obsession with the Nineties is the second disconnect from reality: the family’s collective, blatantly artificial arrested development, which transforms their nostalgia from an external display into an external performance. The family, as seen to outsiders, consists of “strange adult children of anything from thirty to fifty” who engage in “nursery persiflage” with their guests and one another (410). The Finnian Shaws truly are, in the words of another character, *God’s Peterpaniest family*—they have already constructed their surroundings into a dreamworld of Nineties mania; now they will attempt to form themselves into similarly nostalgic figures (520). The idea of a fantasyland and the arrested development seen in the Finnian Shaw adult-children finds a parallel in Baudrillard’s treatment of Disneyland, which also finds a connection between nostalgia and childhood. Baudrillard remarks that “this [hyperreal, simulated] world wants to be childish in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the ‘real’ world, and to conceal the fact that true childishness is everywhere—that it is that of the adults themselves who come here to act the child in order to foster illusions as to their real childishness” (13). The Finnian Shaw family lives in their own sort of Disneyland world, attempting to be “permanent school-children, if

desire counts for anything” (410). The family is comprised solely of adults, but adults who wish to be—and therefore act as—children. Since they cannot return to the state of childhood in their ages or bodies, they instead choose to perform their vision of childhood within the playground of their home, living in a virtual state of denial. Within the home, they can be childlike, in contrast with the illusion that the outside world is comprised of adults and adult-behavior. The Finnian Shaws’ home is their safe haven—much like Hetton Abbey—but their nostalgia seeps from the space of the house into the family’s bodies and actions, becoming external.

The family further accesses this external Disneyland-peterpanishness through their collective obsession with the Finnian Shaws’ father, called Cockeye, who attains mythical status through family lore. The family gathers in their “private nursery” to gain access to Cockeye through the stories that Lord Osmund repeats. Their vision of Cockeye fits into the same sort of mold that the family’s period-prestige demands: “A Cockeye Canon existed by this time. Manner and words both, of the fairy stories the such very adult children told each other of Father, were conventionalized” (574-575). Through access to Cockeye, the Finnian Shaws access a sort of second childhood; indeed, the very appeal of Cockeye, the ancient father, is that he is older than the rest of the Finnian Shaws, who then seem young—and downright childlike—in comparison:

Young is what they [the Finnian Shaws] chiefly desire to appear—and that aged counterpart of themselves, Cockeye—he certainly is *old*—in fact very old—that is his function in the fairy-tale...it does appear, if you study it carefully, that it is lovely to be ‘children’ when one is middle-aged—though a bore at other times. (577)

The “fairy-tale” certainly indicates the fantasy and fabrication behind the creation of Cockeye’s character. Appearances in this family are of primary importance, rather than



the grounding truth: that even the state of childhood and childishness are of limited appeal. The fantasy of Cockeye's age is, in reality, the fantasy of the younger Finnian Shaws, who invoke their father as a tool through which they can carry on the appearance of comparative youth.

Cockeye's fables directly relate to the most important intersection of childhood and nostalgia: the *child-parent-war-game*. The *child-parent-war-game* is, in essence, a sense of violence between parents and children instigated by the psychological complexes and stresses of aging. The Finnian Shaws participate in this (implied) culture-wide, dreamlike war obsession through their own stories of Cockeye. They give their mythical predecessor a disproportionate amount of credit for historical influence, for "according to the rules of the *child-parent-war-game* Cockeye must be honoured with the prodigious charge of having been at the bottom of the European War"—yet "this unimportant old landowner, however waspish and destructive, like his offspring—was certainly not responsible for *that one*" (578). But this nostalgic veneration for Cockeye is required under the "rules" of the *war-game*, despite the fact that the family's disproportionate sense of his political and military importance "makes *historical nonsense*" (578).

The *war-game* also becomes a competition for these (physically adult) children of Lord Osmund—and the descendents of Cockeye—to remain in, or rather reenter, the most youthful state of illusory childhood. To continue the war-game, each member of the Finnian Shaw family acts and attempts to embody the "spirit," or what they perceive as the proper performing, of children by invoking Cockeye. The adult-children participate in the *war-game* in another way: a character who studies the Finnian Shaw family

observes that “none of these children themselves possess children—a sterility that has had the effect of preserving intact the all-important Nursery-situation as you can imagine” (412). Harriet, the youngest (middle-aged) child, takes this imperative to the extreme: she refuses to have children in order that she may continue to “represent the younger generation until she dies of apoplexy” (587). She has unwittingly found a remnant of childhood in her stance: this is pettiness—or childishness—in the extreme.

But the Finnian Shaws did not invent the *child-parent-war-game*; rather, they only participate in it, indicating that the group is one section of a much more widespread and worrisome problem. The novel traces the *war-game* to the effects of the *age-complex* and *youth-complex*, both anxieties of aging which were responsible for “dominating the first Post-war decade” in the whole of British society (553). The results of the age- and youth-complexes have resulted in a culture-wide obsession with war: “The post-war anglo-saxon adult has become a boy with a tin pistol...the War was every anglo-saxon schoolboy’s dream-come-true” (420). The cultural obsession with this memory of war is, much like Cockeye’s escapades, entirely a product of romanticization. It also allows British culture to simultaneously maintain a covering-up of its anxieties through asserting the façades of youth and military dominance.

As with Fredigonde, the child-persona has ties to violence. And the destructive state of childhood seems to be expected both within the family’s social circle and within the wider “anglo-saxon” obsession with tin pistols. A friend of the family, called the Sib, declares Lord Phoebus “unthinkably Fauntleroy” and insists that he “will never grow up—I can’t think of Phoebus as *thirty* can you? I suppose he must be more than that. It seems impossible...I always see Phoebus as a child, just playing with his toys—only he

is not destructive” (517). This lack of destructiveness contrasts with Osmund, who *is* destructive—the Sib also claims, “I have known Osmund to pick a toy to pieces” (517). The toys that Osmund and Phoebus play with are relics of the past—“fragments of ginger-bread work...an Eighteenth Century Japanese bronze mirror—a Trojan face-urn” (527). The toys, or relics, are physical representations of history and memory: Phoebus’s “play” with the relics is an arrangement, a manipulation of symbols that represent the past into the context that he desires. Paired with Phoebus’s manipulations is Osmund, who can obliterate traces of troublesome events or memories that do not match the history that he desires—that in which Cockeye is the instigator of the European War, and that, as a result, his family is of particular youth and importance. Under the guise of childhood, the offspring of Cockeye and the war—Phoebus and Osmund—seem to have the ability to manipulate and ruin history at will. Their “toys” may seem to be trivial, but if they do not amuse by providing the continuation of the family’s nostalgic illusion, they can be destroyed.

The stories of Cockeye’s destructive instigations become examples for more violently-inclined family members to imitate, particularly Lord Osmund. The Finnian Shaws are not interested in looking toward anything remotely resembling a realistic past; they prefer to live in the midst of a fantasyland in which their family is of overwhelming (if destructive) importance and they can maintain the similarly destructive false vestiges of eternal youth—that is to say, until they die.

Through their constructed appearances, the Finnian Shaws are a prime example of wealthy art-imitators that Lewis described in 1926’s *The Art of Being Ruled*:

To state in its awful simplicity the true inner nature of what is happening, *every one wants to be a child, and every one*

*wants to be an artist*; which is of course impossible. All the privileges of lisping innocent and petted childhood, and all the privileges of art, are coveted by the masses of the mature and rich. The mature have developed this particular covetousness because *their* privileges, the privileges and ambitions of mature life, have been ravished from them. The rich have developed it because...it is impossible to enjoy openly the privileges of riches in the present period of transition. (136-137)

The Finnian Shaws are members of these masses, simultaneous imitators of artists and imitators of children—Apes of their respective gods. They are, individually and collectively, “mature” (old) and wealthy; Lewis insinuates that the Finnian Shaws fail in their attempts to be artists; and through the *child-parent-war-game*, he demonstrates the entirely delusional nature of their childishness. Both the Finnian Shaws and Lady Fredigonde Follett show weaknesses in their attempts to live in a nostalgic environment, which are emphasized by the presences, imitations, and façades of children and childlike behavior. The Finnian Shaws’ Achilles’ heel is the outward, bodily appearance of their age, which contrasts with their expressions of child-like behavior; Fredigonde’s failure comes through the bolshevik children’s irreverence and destruction surrounding an imagined museum that reveals psychological nostalgia’s resistance to control, even by that of its creator. Nostalgia, then, fails flamboyantly through the contrast of the genuine child with the imitator adult—and in *The Apes of God*, adults become Apes of Children.

Concepts of failure and the revelation of imitation are not limited to the fictional story contained in *The Apes of God*. The absence of explicit—or even genuine—children is replaced by child-figures, stand-ins for reality. These child-figures are one method that Lewis uses to develop his unique narrative brand—that of unapologetic, bombastic satire of post-Victorian, post-Great War Britain. Because the genuine child is visibly absent,

the child (or lack of child) becomes, again, a tool for pointing out the inherent falseness and illusions of British society in the early decades of the twentieth century. The absence of the genuine calls for a guide that will navigate the shifting, illusory world of interwar Britain—and through flagrant mockery, nostalgia becomes, like the novel's child-figures, a ridiculous aspect of Britain's society that only Wyndham Lewis can navigate.

CHAPTER V  
CONCLUSION

This thesis has covered a fairly broad scope of material in order to look at three interwar texts that demonstrate an evolution in the complexity of child-figures. The issues of childhood and nostalgia are individually prevalent in *A Handful of Dust*, *The Waves*, and *The Apes of God*—three novels from the expansive range of modernist literature in the 1930's. In reverse chronological order by date of publication, each text puts forward increasingly nuanced child-figures, which undergo an evolution from Waugh to Lewis. Waugh's child is fairly straightforward, and is immature in body and mind. Woolf's child juxtaposes an immature body with an intelligent mind that shows signs of adulthood. And Lewis's images of the child are most slippery; children act as destroyers, adults have the bodies of children, and adult-children adopt childlike mannerisms.

Alongside this evolution, each author looks at nostalgia in relation to the child, whether that nostalgia carries the characteristics of a diagnosable (physical or mental) illness, the illusion of the hyperreal, an intense desire to re-experience a romanticized personal past, or a combination thereof. Furthermore, children's relationships with nostalgia are as varied as each novelist's vision of the child or child-figure. For Waugh, the child acts as a catalyst, instigating events that disrupt adults' comfortable nostalgic worlds. Woolf, on the other hand, emphasizes the permanent divide between children and an adult culture that seeks to regain its childhood, which is unobtainable except through the illusion of stories and memory. Finally, Lewis exposes the performance of

childishness (in order to gain access to the fabled past or preserve illusions of youthfulness) as immediately and obviously false.

Through their experiments and explorations of narrative styles, each modernist responds to the shifting, post-Victoria/interwar society. There is an obvious lack of unity between each modernist's vision of childhood and nostalgia, since they approached their manipulation of the child and nostalgia in individual ways. Such an absence of underlying narrative and aesthetic unity points out several things. First, there is no definitive perspective of what the terms "child" and "childhood" entail; children as a group exhibit a complex range of characteristics, and in doing so, resist simple classification. Similarly, there is no singular form of nostalgia, except in the basis that nostalgia looks back to something that no longer exists and can no longer be attained. The manifestations of individual and collective nostalgia vary widely, as do the relationships of children involved with constructions of nostalgia.

After the age of Eliot, Lewis, Woolf, Waugh, and the rest of the women and men who could, in their individual ways, be called modernists, there has been a new increase in literature about and for children. Most bookstores have an entire wing or area geared expressly toward children's literature—which has expanded into even greater age "bubbles" with the emergence of the Young Adult reader that occupies the region between childhood and adulthood. It would be ridiculous to try to detail the amount of works written post-World War II that deal with children and childhood.

Perhaps this represents a return to the romanticism of the child as harbinger of future hope. But Woolf, Lewis, and Waugh's novels from 1930-1934 each introduce children that exist within the story as individuals, distinct from other characters in

personality, perspective, and narrative effect—figures that are not romanticized, disparaged, or generalized. The modernists, though critically overlooked, have left their mark on the world: children in contemporary literature are not romanticized, nor are they idealized. Modernists did “treat” children and nostalgia in their novels. Though Woolf, Lewis, and Waugh together form a range of perspectives in relation to these two terms, their novels have a unifying theme: children operate as narrative tools. They are a kind of promise of access to the past and disappointment of expectation; they also connect to the past, but also reveal that it is gone forever, made inaccessible except through memory. And in their differing visions of childhood in relation to nostalgia, *The Waves*, *The Apes of God*, and *A Handful of Dust* clearly suggest that the child in British interwar fiction (and afterward) must be evaluated on an individual basis, rather than an example of an easily-categorized or definable type.



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