

Children and Childishness in American Postmodernist Literature

**Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of
the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in
Philosophy by**

Oliver James Hancock

December 2021

Acknowledgements

Despite the single name on the cover, this thesis could not have been completed without the support of countless others. Firstly, I owe a great deal to the community of academics and postgraduates at the University of Liverpool, who have steadied me through the day-to-day frustrations and anxieties of writing a PhD, and helped me hone the ideas between these pages. In particular, I'd like to thank my friends in PGR Office 1—Morven Cook, Tom Roberts, Madelaine Smart, Rio Matchett, Hannah Berry and Liam Burrell—whose contributions have made me a better thinker and a better person. The same goes for my supervisors Dr David Hering and Dr Will Slocombe, both of whom have gone above and beyond to support my ideas and ambitions.

Outside of the University, my friends in Liverpool and London have provided much needed emotional support and respite from the PhD process. My family has, as ever, been supportive and enthusiastic, and the love and grounding of my partner Miriam has allowed me to push through a final year of writing during the COVID-19 pandemic. In such testing times, I have been glad to have such fantastic friends and family to lean on, and must recognize the wider efforts of those across the country, particularly in the NHS, who have helped us all during this crisis.

In addition to the above, I must acknowledge the contribution of Liverpool. The city's beauty, wit, art, music, and food—particularly vegetarian breakfasts—have made my stay a very happy one, and have provided the daily motivation to read and write.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	v
Introduction: What Child? Which Postmodernism?	1
The Child and the Childish.....	4
Postmodernism(s) and Postmodernity.....	11
The Scope and Structure of this Study.....	18
 Chapter 1: The Animate Child	25
The Rebellious Child: Pynchon, Burroughs, and Reed.....	31
The Creative Child: Fariña, Brautigan, Ross, and Barth.....	41
Childishness and Postmodernist ‘Play’: Comics, Fairy Tales and Nonsense.....	50
Afterlives of the Animate Child.....	64
 Chapter 2: The Preterite Child	69
‘The Children’s Crusade’: Thomas Pynchon and his Postmodernist Precursors.....	75
‘Feminist Postmodernism’: Fictions of Girlhood in the ‘70s and ‘80s.....	88
‘All Those Peripheral Little Girls’: Toni Morrison and Toni Cade Bambara.....	102
An Overview of the Preterite Child.....	117
 Chapter 3: The Prodigious Child	124
Children, Television and Familial Decline.....	132
The Child Prodigy: Postmodernism at the End of the Century.....	147
The Prodigious Child, or, The Disappearance of Childhood?.....	163
 Chapter 4: The Adult-Child	172
Adult Regression and Postmodern Nostalgia: From Pynchon to Wallace.....	179
Childhood Trauma and the Crisis of Historicity.....	195
Adults/Children, Nostalgia/Trauma.....	210
 Conclusion: The Postmodernist Child	218
Bibliography	234

Abstract

Continuing a tradition of ‘literary child’ studies, this thesis explores the presentation of children, childhood and child culture in American postmodernist literature. Like most of these studies, I lean broadly on the theoretical bases of childhood studies to analyse cultural constructions of childhood through literary texts, and therein display intersections between the literary presentation of children and broader cultural discourse around children and childhood, as well as tracing the influence of important antecedents. In addition, I lean on theories of postmodernism and view the use of children and a broader ‘childishness’ (most notably the use of children’s culture) as centrally enacting many of the aesthetic and ideological manoeuvres associated with postmodernism.

This thesis therein not only analyses the child through the lens of postmodernist literature but also vice versa, and I propose that the depiction of children in these texts can help to elucidate several different threads of postmodernism (or different ‘postmodernisms’) that developed concurrently after the 1950s. Each of my chapters centres around one of these different iterations of postmodernism, located around a separate conception of the child—‘The Animate Child’, ‘The Preterite Child’, and ‘The Prodigious Child’—with a final chapter, ‘The Adult-Child’, dedicated to intersections between each. Centrally, each of these different iterations of the child can be understood as an attempt to collide ‘the childish’ and ‘the adult’, enacting a typically postmodernist deconstruction of the binary, and showing incredulity toward narratives of stable growth and psychosocial development. They can also therein be contextualized amid broader anxieties about child development and adult regression in the later twentieth century, brought on by far-reaching changes to American childhood and American life in general.

I conclude that the ‘Postmodernist Child’ bears witness to a broader collapse of the binary of ‘child’ and ‘adult’ in American social, political and cultural life in the later twentieth century. Here, these texts prove not only highly representative of their time but also prescient, looking ahead to issues around children and technology, emerging adulthood, and the ‘nostalgia boom’ that have characterized the twenty-first century.

Introduction: What Child? Which Postmodernism?

The seed of this thesis started from a simple enough supposition: that literary study had not yet recognized the central role child characters play in postmodernist literature, and that these texts' use of children might tell us much about their status as 'postmodernist'. Whereas there is some level of critical consensus in the importance of the child to the workings of the Victorian social realist novel or Romantic poem, for instance, no studies have yet treated the child of postmodernist literature, and, at its heart, this study aims to rectify that critical blind spot. Yet it quickly became clear that the terms on which it is founded are, by their own admission, lacking in unity and fraught with contradiction. In particular, disagreements about the exact nature of 'postmodernism' have characterized the term since its inception, and nowadays it has become so muddled and misrepresented (particularly given its co-optation by conservative commentators as a loose synonym for identity politics) as to need serious consideration for its continued use in a scholarly study.¹ Elsewhere, the title of my thesis quickly abandoned the totalizing term 'child' for the pluralist emphasis of 'children', given the central axiom of childhood studies that there is no 'universal child', and postmodernism's own incredulity toward such totalizing terminology. Moreover, though the nominalized adjective 'childishness' proved useful—postmodernist literature often relies on child culture, the speech patterns of children, and a more general connotation of juvenility—this too comes at the cost of a great deal of critical specificity and seems to imply some illusory stability to the qualities of the child.² The terms 'juvenility' and 'child culture' seem historically contingent themselves, and we may well ask ourselves whether we can confidently compartmentalize children's culture in an age of Oscar-winning animation, huge collectable toy markets, and ubiquitous comic book movies.

Whilst much of this introduction must be dedicated to clarifying these terms, it should be emphasized that their unstable connotations form the central thrust of my argument, particularly given my belief that the waning sense of 'child' and 'childishness' might be historically grounded. Postmodernist literature provides an ideal testing ground for this theory: it repeatedly interrogates the notion of an 'ideal' or 'universal' child (and, by extension, their uniquely 'childish' qualities), and testifies to the changing discursive formation of 'the child' over the

¹ See, for instance, Stephen Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault* (Tempe, AZ: Scholarly Publishing, 2004); and Jordan Peterson's repeated use of the term (along with 'postmodern neo-Marxism') in *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (London: Penguin, 2018).

² This is similar to Peter Hollindale's broad concept of 'childness', as will be discussed in my first chapter. See Peter Hollindale, *Signs of Childness in Children's Books* (Stroud: Thimble, 1997).

period known as ‘postmodernity’. Whilst the term ‘postmodernism’ is nebulous, I sense that it is still useful in bracketing broad groups of texts and authors, and it was an unintended consequence of this study that viewing children through the lens of postmodernism also allowed me to do the opposite—the child provides a new lens with which to view the workings of postmodernist texts, and different trends in the uses of children can help distinguish and historicize different threads of postmodernism, whilst acknowledging their underlying similarities.³ Of these similarities, the most important to note here is my central thesis: that in all ‘postmodernisms’ we can trace a weakening sense of the ‘child’, particularly relating to its position as a binary opposite to ‘adult’. In these texts, the ‘adult’ and the ‘childish’ converge, to the extent that I believe the intermingling of the two is a recognizably (but not distinctly) postmodernist movement.

My focus on postmodernism, currently a problematic and unfashionable formulation, seems timely to me for two reasons. Firstly, we seem to be far enough away from the ‘postmodern’, or at least from its heyday as a contested space upon which the hopes and fears of the later twentieth century rested, to approach it as a slightly more benign, aesthetic-historical label. Though the continuing ambiguity of the term necessitates a constant vigilance for its use and abuse, the time for debating precisely what ‘postmodernism’ means or whether it ‘really happened’ seems long gone. The task now seems to be to look upon postmodernism with a more historical sensibility, delineating those various threads of postmodernism (or various ‘postmodernisms’, as shall be explored) and their relation to the broader cultural landscape of the later twentieth century, as well as to important antecedents. On the latter, one of the most frustrating trends in conceptualizing postmodernism is to frame it as a radical rupture, as if an entirely self-contained or historical ‘moment’.⁴ Whilst I take it as a given that the aesthetic and ideological connotations of ‘postmodernism’ can be understood as a reaction to the historical conditions of ‘postmodernity’ (both in reflective and adversarial terms), it is clear that they also have a longer prehistory, and that their debts to previous examples of aesthetic experimentation and radical scepticism are often underplayed.

³ My understanding of these different threads is highly indebted to Hans Bertens’ *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (Taylor and Francis, 1994).

⁴ Both Bertens and Huyssen place heavy emphasis on the dangers of seeing postmodernism as an entirely new phenomenon; see Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986), pp.190-1; Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, pp.237-8.

Secondly, gaining a greater understanding of the historical, cultural, and material underpinnings of postmodernism seems of paramount importance to contextualise the moment in which we now found ourselves. Though attempts to proclaim postmodernism alive or dead seem *passé*, we should ignore it at our peril. It should be clear to even the most casual observer that the suspicion of media ‘narrative’, the blurred lines between simulation and reality, the politics of identity, and the intermingling of the aesthetic and commercial, have become foundational in our cultural and political life. If we are no longer living in a ‘postmodern age’, we are certainly seeing its aftermath, and it seems foolish to ignore some of the immediate historical conditions under which these present-day trends have arisen. This extends even to child culture, which may still strike some onlookers as a somewhat insulated enclave from the theoretical concerns of the postmodern—in actual fact, as Stephen Kline notes, the blurring of ‘aesthetic production’ and ‘commodity production’ in a commercialized children’s culture forms one of the clearest iterations of the ‘postmodern revolt’.⁵ By extension, it seems prudent to not only include but centre children in discussions of the postmodern, when, for instance, children’s education bears clear relevance to structures of power/knowledge, and children’s high consumption of television mean that their experience of the ‘hyperreal’ world of late capitalism should be at least as profound as adults’.⁶ Again, these trends not only continue but proliferate in the present day, as contemporary debates about children’s safety online, children’s consumption of social media, and the political responsibilities of children’s culture should remind us.

A quick word about my choice of texts here. Whilst I sense continuances in literature labelled postmodernist to literature released in the last few decades, the rapidly proliferating list of planned authors when I started my study necessitated both that I set the arbitrary boundaries of 1955 and 2000 as my limit of ‘postmodernism’. Moreover, though I think that similar arguments to my own could be extended to authors like J.G. Ballard, Ian McEwan, Roberto Bolaño, Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, and Alain Robbe-Grillet, I have decided to focus on American literature rather than Anglophone literature or literature in translation. Even so, I think that these decisions can be justified over and above the pragmatic; I think that Andreas Huyssen is right, for instance, in noting the ‘specifically American character of postmodernism’ (particularly early postmodernism), and for foregrounding the centrality of the American culture

⁵ Stephen Kline, *Out of the Garden: Toys, TV, and Children’s Culture in the Age of Marketing* (London; New York: Verso, 1993), p.140.

⁶ See *ibid.*, pp.17-18; see also Stephen J. Ball (ed.), *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

industry to the connotations of postmodernity.⁷ In addition, I believe that any attempt to unify authors like those above under the banner of ‘postmodernism’ (or, even worse, something like ‘Western postmodernism’), will smooth out the divergent historical contexts of each nation, and the nuances of different ‘postmodernisms’ that different cultures experienced. As I see it, one of the biggest problems with the discourse of ‘postmodernity’ is its appeal to a broadly Western, or even globalized, experience of the mid-to-late twentieth century, which elides varied trends outside of America. Though my sense of literary antecedents and historical contexts of childhood takes account of longer trends outside of American literature, then, my sense of more direct historical influences sets my study firmly within the United States. Viewing American postmodernism (and its use of children) within the context of these historical conditions, can both help view this literature as a product of its time, and appreciate its continuances into the present day.

The Child and The Childish

Importantly for the historical boundaries of this thesis, both child studies and postmodernism can be rooted in the context of the long Sixties. In-between formative works by John Barth, William Burroughs and Thomas Pynchon, which gave some of the earliest connotations to the term ‘postmodern’, Phillippe Ariès’ influential study *Centuries of Childhood* was released in English translation in 1962. Ariès’ social history, which testified to the changing state of childhood in Europe via readings of artistic and cultural documents, centrally posited that many of our beliefs about childhood—from the necessity of schooling and centrality of the nuclear family to the more general opposition between childish ‘innocence’ and adult ‘experience’—developed only in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to the extent that ‘in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist’.⁸ Though the historical veracity of this claim has been strongly contested, most agree that the early modern period is key to understanding the construction of ‘childhood’ as a distinct life stage, due variously to the rise of pedagogical literature, ‘the emergence of commercial capitalism and the rise of the middle classes’, and steady medical advances by which more children were able to survive in families.⁹ Perhaps most importantly, Ariès’ study opened the door for culturally relativist readings of ‘the child’, and attempts to nuance his claims by acknowledging the claims of evolutionary biology and developmental

⁷ Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, p.190.

⁸ Phillippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962), p.130.

⁹ Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p.16.

psychology still must reckon with the fact that ‘the meanings given to [recognizable patterns of physical and psychological development and growth] vary enormously within and between cultures’.¹⁰

‘Child studies’ or ‘childhood studies’, therefore, aims to probe how the ‘the child’ is variously constituted within a culture, given the central axiom that childhood is less of a biological fact than ‘a socially constructed concept which varies by time, geography, culture, and economic and social status’.¹¹ Highly interdisciplinary, it has now detached itself from the fields on which it draws—such as history, anthropology, psychology, sociology, and biology—but most studies retain a ‘flavour’ of one or more of them. My own study is highly indebted to a tradition of cultural histories that Diana Gittins has characterized in proximity to ‘the development and influence of postmodernist theory’, which is primarily ‘interested in what children and childhood meant to adults, how those attitudes changed and developed, and ways in which they can be analysed particularly drawing on representations of childhood over time’.¹² Gittins’ use of the adjective ‘postmodernist’ is slightly ambiguous here, but she usefully connotes the extent to which this thesis looks to locate the idea of the child in American culture, and American culture usually meant for adults. More specifically, my study forms the continuation of a tradition of ‘literary child’ studies, which interrogate the presentation of childhood in various literary texts and their contexts of production and reception.¹³ Such studies show that literary children can ‘reflect and reveal [contemporary] concerns, cultural tendencies, and areas of interest’ around childhood, but also ‘carry substantial weight’ in service of ‘instruction, allegory, pathos, escapism, satire, identification, demonization, or idealization’.¹⁴ This is an important dual point; though the acknowledgement of these works as oftentimes ‘idealistic’ over ‘descriptive’ testifies to the dislocation between literary representation and life’, as Adrienne E. Gavin notes,

¹⁰ Heather Montgomery, *An Introduction to Childhood: Anthropological Perspectives on Children’s Lives* (Malden, MA; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p.1.

¹¹ Roger Cox, *Shaping Childhood: Themes of uncertainty in adult-child relationships* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), p.5.

¹² Diana Gittins, ‘The historical construction of childhood’, in Sharon Stephens (ed.), *Children and the Politics of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp.25-38 (p.25).

¹³ See, for instance, Peter Coveney, *The Image of Childhood* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967); Robert Pattinson, *The Child Figure in English Literature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978); and Reinhard Kuhn, *Corruption in Paradise: The Child in Western Literature* (Hanover; London: University Press of New England, 1982).

¹⁴ Adrienne E. Gavin, ‘The Child in British Literature: An Introduction’, in *The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary*, ed. Adrienne E. Gavin (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), pp.1-20 (p.3).

she is right that ‘literature does stand entirely apart from life’, and the study of the literary child cannot be divorced from the historical condition of children entirely.¹⁵

Whilst the ‘child’ is culturally contingent, then, the proliferation of literary child studies over the last decades has led to a few stable constructions of ‘the child’ at the nexus of culture and history, which prove important to the conception of ‘the child’ seen herein. I would emphasise the importance of three—the Romantic child, the Enlightenment child, and the Puritan child—that Mary Jane Kehily argues form the basis of present-day constructions of the child.¹⁶ The first connotes children with ‘a spirituality that place[s] them closer to God, nature and all things good’, and respects their ability to ‘express themselves freely and creatively’.¹⁷ The Romantic child is set within an idealized sphere of youth that separates them from adults (and often sees adults’ attempts to socialize children as repressive) but also provides a regenerative vision for those adults who can respect the ‘imagination and innocence’ of the child.¹⁸ By contrast, the Enlightenment child figures children as a ‘tabula rasa’, a mere ‘adult-in-the-making with specific educational needs’ needed to speed them toward rationality and reason.¹⁹ If the Romantic child idealizes child’s play as a healthy part of youth, the Enlightenment child emphasizes the responsibilities of parents and teachers to direct these energies in fruitful ways, and forms the base of our educational institutions in the present day.²⁰ Kehily’s third example, the Puritan child, places an even heavier emphasis on the need to socialize the child; found in some of the earliest American literature, this Christian archetype warns of children being ‘potentially wicked or evil’, and suggests that children will be drawn toward their more animal

¹⁵ Ibid. See also Cox, *Shaping Childhood*, pp.3-4.

¹⁶ Mary Jane Kehily, ‘Understanding childhood: an introduction to some key themes and issues’, in Mary Jane Kehily (ed.), *An Introduction to Childhood Studies* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2004), pp.1-21 (p.5); see also Heather Montgomery, ‘Childhood in Time and Place’, in Martin Woodhead and Heather Montgomery (eds.), *Understanding Childhood: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Chichester: John Wiley, 2003), pp.45-74. Implicit in these three archetypes is also the difference between the ‘Apollonian’ and ‘Dionysian’ models of childhood: the former emphasises the child as innocent, pure and angelic; and the latter represents the child as wild, energetic, and possibly delinquent. See Karen Smith, ‘Producing Governable Subjects: Images of Childhood Old and New’, *Childhood*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2011), pp.24-37.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Roderick McGillis, ‘Irony and Performance: The Romantic Child’, in Gavin (ed.), *The Child in British Literature*, pp.101-115 (p.102); see also William Stroup, ‘The Romantic Child’, *Literature Compass*, 1:1 (2004), pp.1-5.

¹⁹ Kehily, ‘Understanding Childhood’, pp.5-6. See also Natasha Gill’s *Educational Philosophy in the French Enlightenment* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin (eds.), *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2009).

²⁰ Kehily, ‘Understanding Childhood’, pp.5-6.

urges without strict discipline.²¹ Whilst such severe attitudes toward children may seem alien to us today, shades of the Puritan child persist in anxieties about juvenile delinquency, and the use of the ‘evil child’ in horror films, as Karen Renner has highlighted.²²

Consonant with Kehily’s emphasis upon these archetypes’ afterlives in the present, postmodernist literature often betrays its indebtedness to these and other historical constructions of the child, and I note important antecedents at the start of each chapter. When referring to such broad historical characterizations, however, we should recognize that markers like ‘the Enlightenment child’ or ‘the Victorian child’ inevitably represent simplifications of complex trends, which developed unevenly among different groups.²³ Despite advances in the eighteenth and nineteenth century that increasingly saw ‘childhood’ as a separate and sheltered space, Steven Mintz posits that these values were predominantly limited to the middle and upper classes, and ‘it was not until the 1950s that the norms of modern childhood defined the modal experience of young people in the United States’.²⁴ Moreover, when historians aver that a separate sphere of childhood was first developing in the early modern period, Gittins reminds us that ‘boys were the first specialized children’, and so were the first to enjoy new developments in schooling, the material culture of childhood, and freedom from domestic labour.²⁵ Despite most studies offering the ungendered term ‘literary child’, it is clear that young girls and young boys often fulfil very different functions or reflect very different cultural expectations from one another, and these differences remain a key issue in present-day studies of children and children’s culture.²⁶ The same could be said of cultural constructions of race in children, and much scholarship in the last few years has attempted to delineate histories of childhood that do not universalise the condition of the white middle classes in Europe and America.²⁷

²¹ Ibid.; see also Allison Coudert, “Educating Girls in Early Modern Europe and America”, in *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: The Results of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2005), pp.389-414; and David E. Stannard, “Death and the Puritan Child”, *American Quarterly*, 26, no.5 (December 1974), pp.456-476.

²² See Karen J. Renner (ed.), *The “Evil Child” in Literature, Film and Popular Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013). This

²³ See Claudia Nelson, *Precocious Children and Childish Adults: Age Inversion in Victorian Literature* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), pp.6-7.

²⁴ Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004), pp.3-4.

²⁵ Gittins, ‘The historical construction of childhood’, p.35; see also Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, p.62.

²⁶ See Jo Josephidou and Polly Bolshaw (eds.), *Understanding Gender and Early Childhood: An Introduction to the Key Debates* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020); and Nicola Yelland (ed.), *Gender in Early Childhood* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

²⁷ See Tera Eva Agyepong, *The Criminalization of Black Children: Race, Gender, and Delinquency in Chicago’s Juvenile Justice System, 1899-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), p.14. See also Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York and London: New

Despite the use of ‘children’ and ‘childishness’ in my title, therefore, I have tried to remain attentive to the intersections of race, gender and class within these presentations of children, and the oftentimes clear differences underlying them.²⁸ It is clear that the presentation of young girls, for instance, is more often associated with a docile ‘cuteness’ than young boys, who are often used to associate ‘childishness’ with rambunctious energy. Such ‘cuteness’ not only prefigures a view of femininity as passive, self-effacing or asexual but, paradoxically, oftentimes strays into a sexual fetishization of young girlhood, as James Kincaid has emphasized amongst others.²⁹ Such divergent connotations have led to the divergent fields of ‘girlhood studies’ or ‘girl studies’, on the one hand, and ‘boyhood’ studies’ on the other; though a full intervention into these fields is beyond the scope of this thesis, they provide useful frameworks with which to view the differing cultural construction of gendered youth.³⁰ Meanwhile, critics like Caroline Levander have written extensively about the centrality of the child to America’s sense of racial identity—by which the mythic ‘purity’ of the child drifts uncomfortably toward notions of racial purity—and both Robin Bernstein and Dorothy Roberts have similarly emphasized how the conceptualization of childhood innocence is clearly ‘raced white’.³¹ Black children, by contrast, are often associated with delinquency or violence, or as a labouring force undeserving of the same protections and schooling afforded white children, a view rooted in the treatment of young black slaves during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³² As much postmodernist literature will attest to, these differences persist long into the twentieth century and beyond, and the authorship contained within my own study means that the view of childhood expressed herein tends too to centre upon young white boys. This being said, texts’ focus upon the culturally constructed nature of ‘the child’ places heavy emphasis upon the intersections of identity that this homogenizing term elides, and authors often treat the raced and gendered connotations of

York University Press, 2011); Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011).

²⁸ This homogenizing term ‘child’ is also often used in literary child studies to group young people of any age, which seems problematic given that the distinctive ‘adolescent’ or ‘young adult’ came into focus during the twentieth century. For this reason I have focused on depictions of characters between the ages of about two years old and fifteen years old, though such arbitrary markers are often misleading, and I have had to remain agile in my argument to acknowledge relevant contexts set within the wider realm of ‘youth culture’. See Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (London: Pimlico, 2007); and Nancy J. Cobb, *Adolescence: Continuity, Change and Diversity* (California City: Mayfield, 1995).

²⁹ See, for instance, James Kincaid’s *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998); and *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994).

³⁰ See, for example, the journals *Boyhood Studies* (founded in 2007) and *Girlhood Studies* (founded in 2008); and Mary Celeste Kearney, ‘Coalescing: The Development of Girls’ Studies’, *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 21, No.1 (Spring 2009), pp.1-28.

³¹ Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, pp.4-5.

³² See Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage, 1997), and Carl Suddler, *Presumed Criminal: Black Youth and the Justice System in Postwar New York* (New York: New York University Press, 2019).

‘childishness’ head-on. Particularly in my second chapter, we see the faulty conceptual unity of ‘the child’ held to account, both for its erasure of cultural difference, and the way in which its idealized conception of the child sanctions the abuse of real children. Such texts provide a challenge to the conceptual unity of ‘the child’, revealing a medley of culturally situated ‘children’, and showing the ideological biases that lurk beneath the distinction between ‘the childish’ and ‘the adult’.

Whilst this scepticism provides a useful lens to view the constructed ‘child’ of all cultures, we should emphasize here the context of childhood in the twentieth century U.S.A. Central to this conception of children is the shift from a ‘premodern’ to a ‘modern’ childhood over the eighteenth and nineteenth century, which increasingly saw children less as potential labourers than ‘innocent, malleable, and fragile creatures who needed to be sheltered from contamination’, and childhood as a ‘separate stage of life that required special care and institutions to protect it’.³³ This both led to an increasingly compartmentalized ‘children’s culture’ (as distinct from ‘adult’ forms), and a parallel concern for the wellbeing of children that led to unprecedented legislative action to enshrine their rights to education and protect them from a world of physical labour.³⁴ This sense of the separate spheres of childhood and adulthood, and the need to protect the former from the dangers of the latter, forms a key context at the turn of the twentieth century—which Ellen Key famously predicted would be the ‘century of the child’³⁵—when the ‘economically useless but emotionally priceless child’ emerged as the dominant image of childhood.³⁶ As Viviana Zelizer notes, ‘new sentimental criteria were now established’ to characterize the ‘worth’ of a child, and consensus emerged that children (again, especially white children) had innate rights to be emotionally nurtured and protected from the harsher realities of ‘adult’ life. Undoubtedly this led to greater institutionalization and socialization of children, and Harvey J. Graff associates the early 1900s with both ‘increasing dependence’ and ‘rising levels of segregation by age’, noting the many familiar organizations (from the public school system to the Boy Scouts) that came into focus during the Progressive Era.³⁷ Even so, this same period also saw what Howard Chudacoff has described as children’s ‘most successful assertion of play

³³ Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, pp.3-4.

³⁴ See Clark Nardinelli, ‘Child Labor and the Factory Acts’, *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (December 1980), pp.739-55; Johann M. Neem, *Democracy’s Schools: The Rise of Public Education in America* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2017), and Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*.

³⁵ See Ellen Key, *The Century of the Child* (Frankfurt am Main: Outlook, 2020).

³⁶ Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, p.209.

³⁷ Harvey J. Graff, *Conflicting Paths: Growing Up in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p.305.

independence' in America; the increasing availability of public parks and playgrounds, a flourishing children's literary market, and the popularization of new forms like comic books and Saturday afternoon movie matinees 'catered to an enriched children's culture and broadened youth autonomy' in the era.³⁸

This golden age of children's culture reaches a height—and many would argue, a significant downturn—in the 1950s where my study begins. It is this decade that, paradoxically, the 'modern' values of childhood became the dominant mode of American children's existence, and were simultaneously frayed by the onset of what Mintz calls a 'postmodern' childhood.³⁹ Partly, this acknowledges the 'commercialization and co-optation' of children's culture that followed the creation of mass-produced plastic toys and the increasing ubiquity of television in the 1950s, and Chudacoff notes many familiar names that can be traced to these years: the first Barbie was released in 1956, first G.I. Joe in 1964, and Disneyland opened its doors in 1955.⁴⁰ In the decades that followed, the deregulation of children's advertising and the abandonment of any pretence toward educational content led to an explosion in the children's culture industry, which reached a height after the onset of the cable television era in the 1980s.⁴¹ Though we might say that the later twentieth century marks child culture's entry into the logic of late capitalism, we should also note that increasing innovations in children's culture were, from the first instance, paralleled by increasing interventions, from the anti-Communist propaganda implanted into 1950s comic books to the hysteria about television and video games in the 1980s.⁴² Delight at children's increased autonomy came hand in hand with concerns about unsupervised children and the dangers of 'adult' content, and the increasing visibility of children in television and film was accompanied by the repeated proclamation that childhood was 'disappearing', in the famous words of Neil Postman.⁴³

It is at the centre of these paradoxes that I aim my readings. In many ways the late twentieth century has seen the 'century of the child' come to fruition: most American children

³⁸ Howard P. Chudacoff, *Children at Play: An American History* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), pp.99, 122.

³⁹ Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, pp.3-4.

⁴⁰ See Chudacoff, *Children at Play*, p.158.

⁴¹ See Kline, *Out of the Garden*, pp.123-4, pp.140-1.

⁴² See Victoria Grieve, *Little Cold Warriors: American Childhood in the 1950s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); and Brian Sutton-Smith, *Toys as Culture* (New York: Gardner Press, 1986), p.66-7.

⁴³ Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1982); Marie Winn, *Children without Childhood* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

now enjoy unparalleled prosperity and freedom, over half of all advertisements feature a child,⁴⁴ and politicians of all stripes invoke the condition of children to legitimate wildly differing agendas, as Henry Jenkins has emphasized.⁴⁵ Yet many scholars have noted that a defining feature of this ‘postmodern’ period of childhood has been the sense that childhood is in crisis and children are under threat, or that ‘children’ and ‘adults’ have become indistinguishable from one another.⁴⁶ Clearly, this breakdown of the binary of child and adult—which in many ways represents a return to a ‘premodern’ condition of childhood, as Mintz observes—has been regarded with some concern, and postmodernist literature often emphasizes the co-optation of children’s minds by an ‘adult’ consumer culture as an aberration.⁴⁷ Even so, a study of this literature yields not just a reflection or refutation of familiar narratives of progress or decline, but an interrogation of the various binaries that lay at the heart of the ‘childish’ and ‘adult’. The child is seen as an overtly political battleground, whose conceptual clarity seems to depend on an interrelated series of traditions and biases, particularly regarding the proper comportment and cultural tastes of each. The main legacy of the ‘postmodern’ era of childhood, then, is the ‘breakdown of dominant norms about the family, gender roles, age, and even reproduction’, and postmodernist literature often provides an overt challenge to the ways in which these ‘dominant norms’ shape our understanding and treatment of real children.⁴⁸

Postmodernism(s) and Postmodernity

Like attempts to taxonomize ‘the child’ or ‘the childish’, it seems futile here to attempt a simple definition of ‘postmodernism’ or ‘postmodernity’. Certainly, we can distinguish the two as referring to a stylistic or ideological framework (‘postmodernism’), and a historical period set somewhere within the mid- to late twentieth century (‘postmodernity’), but collapsing them remains difficult, and each is used in irreconcilably different ways by different disciplines.⁴⁹ Even within literary studies, the term is used to refer to both an austere minimalism (Barthelme, Acker, Vonnegut) and encyclopaedic maximalism (Pynchon, Barth, Wallace), and it couches within a variety of more precise terms, many of which seem mutually exclusive: Metafiction, Fabulism, Hyper-realism, Encyclopaedism, Magical Realism, Hysterical Realism. Works often associated

⁴⁴ See Hugh Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood* (London: BBC Books, 2006), p.208.

⁴⁵ See Jenkins, ‘Childhood Innocence and Other Myths’, pp.1-4.

⁴⁶ See Cox, *Shaping Childhood*, p.167.

⁴⁷ Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, p.4.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ See Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, p.4-5; and Simon Malpas, *The Postmodern* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp.9-10.

with the term range from Gaddis' *The Recognitions* (1955) to Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* (2013), and several figures at either end sit in limbo as transitional figures from a modernist aesthetic (Beckett, Nabakov, Borges), or into post-postmodernist one (Wallace, Eggers, Franzen). Whilst almost all of the authors included in this thesis have been characterized as 'postmodernist' before, then, it seems prudent to acknowledge that the term covers a vast gamut of different styles and approaches, and gives a misleading historical unity to a period of far-reaching cultural and social change.⁵⁰

Like 'childhood', it seems best to approach 'postmodernism' with appropriate scepticism as to its conceptual unity and attend to its historical bases. Here, the work of Hans Bertens and Andreas Huyssen can help understand three overlapping threads of the 'postmodern', or even three different 'postmodernisms', which provide the groundwork for the ways in which I use the term. As Bertens notes, the term came to prominence in the 1960s in the work of Leslie Fiedler and Ihab Hassan, who linked the experimental fiction of writers like Vonnegut, Pynchon, and Barthelme with the spirit of the counterculture; such writers' irreverent style showed kinship with 'adolescent violence, hipster anarchy and Oriental mysticism',⁵¹ and a distrust of the 'cult of reason'.⁵² Centrally, this view of postmodernism noted a new transgression of the binary between 'high art' and 'mass culture'—what Huyssen would later call 'the Great Divide'—in early postmodernists' equal fervour for Classical mythology, canonized literature, television shows, comic-books, and pulp science fiction.⁵³ This was not necessarily the new development many at the time thought it was (and Fiedler does note the anarchic 'anti-art' of Dada as a significant precursor)⁵⁴ but Huyssen is persuasive in his argument that the European avant-garde had not received due attention in the United States, making its reoccurrence in the guise of early postmodernism, Fluxus, and 'Happenings' seem like an entirely fresh American avant-garde.⁵⁵ In any case, it is clear that this new artistic spirit was taken to be a repudiation of the values of a 'modernist' tradition long since stripped of its avant-garde potential; unlike a (limited) selection of canonized modernists whose intertextual logic often seemed elitist or regressive, this new

⁵⁰ David Cowart, 'Prolonged Periodization American Fiction After 1960', in Paula Geyh (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern American Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp.28-46 (p.28).

⁵¹ Leslie Fiedler, 'The New Mutants', *Partisan Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Fall 1965), pp.505-525 (p.509).

⁵² Ihab Hassan, 'The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Reflections on Modern Culture, Language and Literature', *The American Scholar*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Summer, 1963), pp. 463-484 (p.464).

⁵³ See Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986).

⁵⁴ Fiedler, 'The New Mutants', p.510.

⁵⁵ Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, pp.167-8.

‘post-modernism’ revelled in its ability to be ‘silly’ or ‘profane’, and allied itself with the progressive pluralism of the New Left.

In the 1970s and 1980s, postmodernism was ‘gradually drawn into a poststructuralist orbit’,⁵⁶ and much usage of the term consisted of an attempt to read literature through the lens of theories by Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault. Postmodernism here is associated less with the cultural upheaval of long Sixties than a theoretical turn away from the ‘empirical idea that language can represent reality’.⁵⁷ Derrida’s rejection of the ‘transcendental signifier’ (and Barthes’ rejection of the ordering concept of ‘the author’) gives reign to a ‘free play’ of signifiers and interpretations; social or psychological realism gives way to a focus on language games and metatextuality; and the ‘autonomous subject of modernity [...] gives way to a postmodern subject which is [...] determined within and constituted by language’.⁵⁸ Particularly in conjunction with the theories of Foucault, authors’ focus on the constitution of the subject reveals the extent to which language (and language’s creation and legitimation of knowledge) is inevitably tied up with dynamics of power and authority. Along these lines, we can trace an increasingly political strain of postmodernist literature in the 1970s and 1980s, which ‘interrogate the power that is inherent in the discourses that surround us’ and ‘interrogates the institutions that support those discourses’.⁵⁹ Bolstered by postcolonialist theories associated with Said and Spivak, this traces the manoeuvres by which a ‘liberal humanist subject (white, male, heterosexual, and rational) constitute[s] the “Other”’ along axes of race, gender, sexuality and able-bodiedness, a form of discursive violence that informs patterns of marginalization in social and political life.⁶⁰ Derridean deconstructionism becomes less a means by which to show the arbitrary relation of all signs than a method to uncover the latent power relations in discourse, short-circuiting white supremacist, patriarchal, Eurocentric or heteronormative discourse in the implicit service of pluralism and difference.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, pp.6-7.

⁵⁷ Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, p.171.

⁵⁸ Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, p.6; see also Huyssen’s discussion of the ‘American domestication of French poststructuralism’ in ‘Mapping the Postmodern’, *New German Critique*, No. 33 (Autumn 1984), pp.5-52 (pp.38-9). Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, p.6; see also the related discussion of the ‘death of the subject’ in Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1992), pp.15-16.

⁵⁹ Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, pp.7-8.

⁶⁰ Ibid. See also Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1988), pp.271-313.

⁶¹ Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, p.8.

By the 1980s and 1990s, theories about postmodernism broadened into a focus on the ‘postmodern condition’, as advanced by theorists like Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson and Francois Lyotard. This is perhaps the most historically grounded account of postmodernism, which gives rise to the periodizing term ‘postmodernity’. In this view, postmodernity is defined by the conditions of ‘late capitalism’, a new phase in the later twentieth century that sees ‘the accumulative logic of capitalism extend into every possible area of society’.⁶² From this standpoint, the blurring of high art and mass culture represents less an ‘anti-modernist’ rebellion than the co-optation of artistic practice by commercial interests, and the ironic mood of postmodernism represents less a waning belief in mimesis than the problem of ‘critical distance’—namely, how can one criticize anything outside of the text when a hyperconnected global economy means that author and reader cannot help but be complicit?⁶³ This is exacerbated by the rise of high technology, by which Baudrillard proposed that we had lost our sense of ‘the real’; not only do new technologies immerse us in a world of ‘the virtual’, but our consumer drive is stimulated primarily by ‘reproductions’ (images, videos, advertisements, styles) rather than actual products.⁶⁴ Spiritually and emotionally, this leads to the ‘waning of affect’ many critics note in postmodernist literature, as well as a suspicion of attempts to proclaim genuine or transformative beliefs and values.⁶⁵ Politically and economically, it ossifies a kind of ‘capitalist realism’ (as Mark Fisher would eventually call it), by which the structures of late capitalism seem the only system by which humans can live; particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s, this vision of capitalism was proclaimed to have triumphed over all, and the spread of its mechanisms throughout the world seemed an inevitability.⁶⁶

Most visions of postmodernism lean on one or more of these threads, and there have been mixed attempts to unify them into a single aesthetic-theoretical-historical theory. Comprehensive attempts to legitimate ‘postmodernism’ in this way tend to be glib and

⁶² Bran Nichol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.3.

⁶³ See Jameson, *Postmodernism*, pp.70-71.

⁶⁴ See Norman K. Denzin, ‘Postmodern Social Theory’, *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Autumn 1986), pp.194-204; Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p.3. See also Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, pp.19-23; Jameson, *Postmodernism*, pp.36-7.

⁶⁵ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p.10; see also Nichol, *Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*, pp.184-5.

⁶⁶ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: O Books, 2009); Jameson, *Postmodernism*, pp.49-51; see also Francis Fukuyama, ‘The End of History?’, *The National Interest*, No. 16 (1989), pp. 3-18.

problematic, but we could pick out a few common ideas, even if they seldom reach beyond the level of a pithy aphorism. Perhaps most famous is Lyotard's suggestion that the essence of the postmodern was 'an incredulity toward metanarratives', aptly intimating that the label tends to imply a kind of scepticism, especially toward those totalizing narratives which might attempt to unify a timeless 'truth' or universal 'reality'.⁶⁷ In terms of how this functions in postmodernist literature, Brian McHale provides a fertile distinction between the 'ontological' mode of postmodernist fiction and the 'epistemological' mode of modernist fiction, arguing that postmodernist fiction has given up the project of trying to 'understand' or 'recreate' the world.⁶⁸ Such binaries are potentially useful but also dangerous, inasmuch as they lead to diachronic views of both (in which, for example, Dada is 'early postmodernist', and Don DeLillo is a 'late modernist') whereas I see the terms' most useful deployment as a differentiation between the early and later twentieth century.⁶⁹ In my usage then, the term exists as an aesthetic-historical marker of literature in the second half of the twentieth century which bears the mark of a 'postmodern' scepticism, related in particular to the mimetic and didactic functions of narrative and representation. In terms of how this looks on the page, this tends to manifest in a tendency toward uncertainty, unreliability, disorder, discontinuity, metatextuality, metalepsis, heterogeneity, polyphony, and relativism.⁷⁰

Still, I believe the purpose of studying 'postmodernism' should no longer be an attempt to taxonomize or explicate. Its status as an 'empty signifier' make it elusive but also useful in bringing together variant texts and authors, as Platt and Upstone argue, and the broad umbrella of 'postmodernism' can help us better understand various links between texts and contexts.⁷¹ In literary studies, this also makes it a valuable tool of canon forming and reforming, allowing us to illuminate those areas of 'postmodernism' that might untie it from the 'roll call of white male novelists' that Kathleen Fitzpatrick notes still make up the backbone of the postmodernist

⁶⁷ Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.xxiv.

⁶⁸ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (Taylor and Francis, 1987), pp.9-10.

⁶⁹ See for instance Mark Pegrum's account of modernism's 'Apollonian mode' in comparison to postmodernism's 'Dionysian mode': Mark Pegrum, *Challenging Modernity: Dada between Modern and Postmodern* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000). See also Matei Calinescu, 'Postmodernism and some Paradoxes of Periodization', in Douwe W. Fokkema and Hans Bertens (eds.), *Approaching Postmodernism* (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1986), pp.239-54.

⁷⁰ See Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York & London: Routledge, 1988), p.57.

⁷¹ Len Platt and Sara Upstone, 'Introduction', in Platt and Upstone (eds.), *Postmodern Literature and Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) pp.1-11 (p.3).

canon.⁷² Tellingly, most of the authors she names (including Pynchon, Barth, Coover, and Gaddis) are not only white men, but representative predominantly of the earliest canonized authors by Hassan and Fiedler, and tied to the context of the long Sixties. For at least the last thirty years much scholarship has fought against this rigid canonization, both to broaden its narrow vista and to acknowledge the extent to which the term has long since migrated from a marker of 'post-modernist' experimentalism. Perhaps most famously, Linda Hutcheon's landmark *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) uses the term 'historiographic metafiction' to expand the canon, and to underline the inherent political implications of postmodernism's deconstructive tendencies; similarly, critics like Martina Sciolino, Madhu Dubhey and Philip Brian Harper have delineated the 'black postmodernism' of authors like Ishmael Reed, Toni Morrison and Percival Everett, or the 'feminist postmodernism' of Kathy Acker and Angela Carter.⁷³ Even so, it is clear that the presence of women and people of colour in a postmodernist canon is still an active debate, and many scholars may well think that the term—particularly without any of the qualifiers listed above—is beyond saving as a tool of serious critical study in the 2020s.

This deserves some recognition, and keys into the problematic connotations of 'postmodernism' more generally. As has been emphasized repeatedly, one of the central ironies of postmodernism is the extent to which its celebration of difference still centres on a canon of highly educated white men, and attempts to collapse postmodernist theories into those of feminism or critical race theory have been met with a mixed response. Essays like Chris Owens' famous 'Postmodernism and Feminism', for instance, show the potential for overlap between the deconstructive logic of postmodernism and the ambitions of feminism, which seem to broadly coincide in the work of feminist theorists like Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Helene Cixous, but these thinkers remain deeply suspicious of the term.⁷⁴ Elsewhere, bell hooks' essays 'Postmodern Blackness' and 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical

⁷² Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *The Anxiety of Obsolescence: The American Novel in the Age of Television* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006), p.206.

⁷³ See Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, pp.5-7, 57-60. See also Madhu Dubey, *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Phillip Brian Harper, *Framing the Margins: The Social Logic of Postmodern Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Martina Sciolino, 'Kathy Acker and the Postmodern Subject of Feminism', *College English*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (April. 1990), pp.437-445; Nicola Pitchford, *Tactical Readings: Feminist Postmodernism in the Novels of Kathy Acker and Angela Carter* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002).

⁷⁴ Craig Owens, 'The Discourse of Others: Feminism and Postmodernism', in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1983), pp.57-82; see also Judith Butler, 'Contingent foundations: Feminism and the question of "postmodernism"', in Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic*, pp.153-170.

Openness' are often cited as examples of black postmodernism, given their emphasis upon 'counter-hegemonic cultural practice' and 'marginality [...] as a site of resistance'.⁷⁵ However, Madha Dubey is right to note that 'theories of postmodernism are generally developed without reference to the specificities of African-American life and history', and seem to '[assume] a white Western subject as its normative centre', or at least abstract the experience of racism within a more general 'postmodern condition'.⁷⁶ Essentially, even in the service of those 'Othered' from this faulty vision of universality, much work associated with postmodernism often slides into a 'fetishism of racial "Others"', calling to 'activate the differences' whilst thereby reifying a vision of these 'Others' alterity.⁷⁷ This is despite the fact that, as Dubey notes, 'most versions of the politics of difference have modelled themselves on the Civil Rights and Black Power movements', and the 'postmodernist' emphasis upon discursive violence rephrases theories advanced by W.E.B. DuBois, Langston Hughes and Franz Fanon long before Foucault or Lyotard.⁷⁸ One could make a similar claim for feminist theory; these thinkers' conceptualization of alterity owes much to Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, and theories of the culturally constructed bases of gender find bases at least as far back as Mary Wollstonecraft.⁷⁹

Clearly, we should recognise that the label 'postmodernism' is not only problematic (by its own logic) in its erasure of cultural difference, but is fundamentally ahistorical in its assumption of a radical break from the past—as Wahneema Lubiano quips, for instance, '[black] history shows that we have maintained a fairly consistent level of incredulity toward such narratives; perhaps it is time that the "West" caught up with us'.⁸⁰ For this reason, I have cast the net of 'postmodernism' widely, and must emphasize that the term gives perhaps a faulty conceptual unity toward a group of texts whose various 'incredulities toward metanarrative' are deployed with markedly different aims and contextual framings. Postmodernist narrative

⁷⁵ bell hooks, 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness', *The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 1989, No. 36 (1989), pp. 15-23; bell hooks, 'postmodern blackness', in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), pp.23-32.

⁷⁶ Dubey, *Signs and Cities*, p.7.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.8. See also Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.82.

⁷⁸ Dubey, *Signs and Cities*, pp.19-20. See also W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903); Langston Hughes, 'The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain', *The Nation* (23 June, 1926), pp.692-694; Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967).

⁷⁹ See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009).

⁸⁰ Wahneema Lubiano, 'The Postmodernist Rag: Political Identity and the Vernacular in Song of Solomon', in Valerie Smith (ed.), *New Essays on Song of Solomon*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.93-116 (p.95).

techniques located in Ishamel Reed, for instance, may be better understood within the history of 'black American vernacular Signifying';⁸¹ meanwhile, Louise Erdrich's resistance to historical teleology and embrace of contradiction represents a debt as much to the Ojibwe creation story as a 'postmodernist' tradition.⁸² Moreover, though I have used the term 'postmodernism' to bracket a series of texts between 1955 and 2000, I agree with critics like Dubey and Lubiano that the aesthetic qualities of the 'postmodernist' have a much longer prehistory than is suggested its use as a periodizing term, and intersect with contexts that are oftentimes underplayed in favour of broad appeals to 'the condition of postmodernity'. With this in mind, a major focus of each of my chapters has been to locate the contexts of production and reception of these 'postmodernist' texts, and trace the influence of longer literary and artistic antecedents. Whilst this study leans on a broad conception of 'postmodernism', then, its historical sense sets the term firmly within the last seventy years of U.S. history.

The Scope and Structure of this Study

Like many previous studies of the 'literary child' of various texts and contexts, this study aims to reach a broad characterization of the 'Postmodernist Child' via key archetypes and trends. In particular, I am indebted to Reinhard Kuhn's 'intertextual' approach, by which he studies a comprehensive range of historical texts, grouping different 'children' under broad umbrella terms ('the Redemptive Child', 'the Enigmatic Child', and so forth).⁸³ Such terms are used less to taxonomize a stable 'type' than to group variant texts and contexts together, and though my use of comparable terms has more of a historical sense than Kuhn's, they similarly act to bracket large groups of markedly different authors. Whilst Katie Knowles and Ann Blake are right to emphasise that the tendency to use such homogenizing terms to trace patterns in the literary depiction of childhood oftentimes masks the 'disparate and varied functions' that children hold in different texts,⁸⁴ I have chosen to follow critics like Kuhn and Coveney in their focus on broader trends and archetypes rather than the nuances of individual texts. This study is thus methodologically more akin to a historical survey than a series of close readings or close critical analysis, attempting to trace in literary works both the 'cultural and historical positioning of

⁸¹ Lubiano, 'The Postmodernist Rag', p.93. See also Aldon Lynn Neilsen, *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁸² See Jennifer Sergi, 'Tradition and Preservation in Louise Erdrich's Tracks', *World Literature Today*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp.279-82.

⁸³ See Kuhn, *Corruption in Paradise*.

⁸⁴ Katie Knowles, 'Shakespeare's 'terrible infants'? Children in *Richard III*, *King John* and *Macbeth*', in Gavin (ed.) *The Child in British Literature*, pp.38-53 (p.38); Ann Blake, 'Children and Suffering in Shakespeare's Plays', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 23, Early Shakespeare Special Number (1993), pp.293-304 (p.300).

fictional childhood',⁸⁵ and thereby to yoke the 'postmodernist child' both to the historical conditions of postmodernity and the stylistic and ideological manoeuvres associated with postmodernism. This means I have also strayed away from discussions of individual authors and authorial biography, choosing to study texts in proximity to the term 'postmodernism' rather than to their authors. I leave it to other single-author studies and narrower historical studies to unpick these variants in more detail, and must also acknowledge my debt to the few existing studies of children in some of the authors considered here, particularly the discussion of Don DeLillo in Ellen Pifer's *Demon or Doll*, the dual articles on Pynchon's use of children by Strother Purdy and Sofia Kolbuszewska, and work on Toni Morrison's depiction of childhood by Pamela Thurschwell and Anne Salvatore.⁸⁶

This being said, I should emphasise that this topic has had almost no sustained interest outside of these examples. Indeed, one of the most frustrating platitudes I ran across was that children have 'almost disappeared' from recent fiction;⁸⁷ certainly, the majority of literary child studies focus on depictions from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (in proximity to the more stable characterizations of the 'Romantic child' or 'Victorian child'), and it is only relatively recently that due critical attention has been paid to children in twentieth-century fiction outside of children's literature.⁸⁸ Whilst forming a natural continuation to a tradition of literary child studies, then, this thesis also traverses much wholly new ground, and will hopefully lay the foundations for a field of 'postmodernist childhood' studies in the future. As the first major study of this kind, I have tried to strike a balance between acknowledging the canonized authors of 'postmodernism', and trying to expand this canon beyond the culturally homogenous authors that still make up the majority of this canon. Thomas Pynchon looms large in this thesis, for

⁸⁵ Gavin, 'The Child in British Literature', p.1. See also Coveney, *The Image of Childhood* and Pattinson, *The Child Figure in English Literature*.

⁸⁶ Ellen Pifer, *Demon or Doll: Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture* (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), pp.212-30; Strother Purdy, 'Gravity's Rainbow and the Culture of Childhood', in *Pynchon Notes*, Vol. 22-23 (1988), pp.7-23; Sofia Kolbuszewska, "It Has to Be More Than the Simple Conditioning of a Child, Once Upon a Time": The Use of the Child in *Gravity's Rainbow*', *Pynchon Notes*, Vol.42-3 (1998) pp.111-20; Anne T. Salvatore, 'Toni Morrison's New Bildungsromane: Paired Characters and Antithetical Form in *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *Beloved*', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp.154-178; and Pamela Thurschwell, 'Dead Boys and Adolescent Girls: Unjoining the Bildungsroman in Carson McCuller's *The Member of the Wedding* and Toni Morrison's *Sula*', *English Studies in Canada*, Vol. 38, No. 3-4 (2012), pp.105-128.

⁸⁷ Pifer notes this contentious claim in *Demon or Doll*, p.2.

⁸⁸ As well as Ellen Pifer's *Demon or Doll*, see for instance James Holt MacGavran (ed.), *Literature and the Child: Romantic Continuities, Postmodern Contestations* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999); Michelle H. Phillips, *Representations of Childhood in American Modernism* (London and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016); and Daniela Casselli's upcoming monograph on children in modernist literature.

instance, as perhaps the foremost canonized postmodernist author, but potentially lesser-known authors like Rikki Ducornet, Bertha Harris, Carole Maso and Fran Ross also form an essential part of my argument. Trying to walk this line within a reasonable word count has been difficult, and has informed the boundaries I have set myself with regard to the historical and national limits of ‘American postmodernism’. As mentioned, similar theories could be extended to many European, Asian or South American authors, and though I have reservations about the attempt to formulate a post-postmodernist canon around authors like David Foster Wallace, it is clear that including authors after the year 2000 would be stretching the term far too thin.⁸⁹ Even within the period of 1950 to the turn of the century, the term ‘postmodernism’ could be better termed ‘postmodernisms’, and this thesis contains several different threads of the term which overlap but do not necessarily coincide.

Here, my focus on the child provides a useful way to elucidate three interlinked variants of postmodernist literature, tied to the different connotations of ‘postmodernism’ emphasized earlier. This has influenced the four chapters that structure my thesis—‘The Animate Child’, ‘The Preterite Child’, ‘The Prodigious Child’ and ‘The Adult-Child’—which provide a broadly chronological picture of these changing archetypes, organized around the changing usage of ‘postmodernism’ noted earlier. My first chapter, ‘The Animate Child’, focuses on literature associated with Hassan and Fiedler’s sense of the term, and places the literary child within the context of the long Sixties. Here, the child is seen as an icon of ‘animate’ energy, and child culture is used to provide an irreverent challenge to the expectations of ‘serious’ literature. Authors like Pynchon, Burroughs and Ishmael Reed use the image of the rebellious child to collapse a series of generational qualms into an encounter between a righteous ‘childish’ culture and a fallen ‘adult’ culture, oftentimes in ways obviously indebted to the iconography of student protest and juvenile delinquency that characterized the era. Other authors, such as Richard Brautigan, Richard Fariña and Fran Ross, use the child as an imaginative foil to a cast of dull and morally compromised adults, and much early postmodernism by Barthelme, Barth, Steve Katz and Robert Coover uses narrative forms and imagery hewn from fairy tales, comic-books, animated cartoons, nursery rhymes, and nonsense literature. Such ‘childish’ intertexts, which have been underexplored in criticism of early postmodernism thusfar, provide both a bathetic

⁸⁹ For more on developments after postmodernism, see Robin Van Der Akker, Alison Gibbons and Timotheus Vermeulen (eds.), *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth after Postmodernism* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017); Jeffrey Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); and Alan Kirby, *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture* (New York & London: Continuum, 2009).

counterpoint to moments of high seriousness and flaunt the essential artifice of literary representation. As will be explored, the aesthetic logic of early postmodernism thereby bears comparison to theories of child's play and 'play' in the Derridean sense of the term, betraying a scepticism to the notion of stable or privileged meaning, and representing interpretation as little more than a series of language games.

My second chapter, 'The Preterite Child', focuses on literature released in the 1970s and 1980s, after theories associated with poststructuralism had migrated into the American academy. Prefigured by the work of black humourists like Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut, in which children are centred as the innocent victims of 'adult' exploitation, and artefacts of child culture provide a darkly comic counterpart to scenes of death and destruction, I centre *Gravity's Rainbow* for its representation of the 'Preterite', those 'passed over by God and History'.⁹⁰ Child-victims abound in this work as well, but Pynchon also recalls Foucault in his depiction of the entanglements of discourse and power, and explores less overt mechanisms of violence against children, particularly in the way in which an idealized 'childishness' comes to sanction the abuse of real children. This kind of 'discursive violence' against children comes to the fore in fiction by Bertha Harris, Kathy Acker, Erica Jong, Toni Cade Bambara, and Toni Morrison, in which this 'childishness' is revealed to be constructed along the lines of race and gender. Such authors accompany scenes of child abuse with an interrogation of pedagogy, propaganda, and the latent ideology passed down from one generation to another through culture and language. Indeed, these novels often show a metatextual urge to pastiche or rewrite canonical literature, and deconstruct the 'myths' of childhood bolstered by these cultural expressions. Consonant with Lyotard's call to 'activate the differences',⁹¹ these texts testify to the multitude of childhood experiences 'passed over' by visions of the 'ideal' child, and the way in which these visions of privileged childhood innocence elide the social and material contingencies upon which a 'happy childhood' rests.

My third chapter, 'The Prodigious Child', focuses on novels released in the 1980s and 1990s about the 'postmodern condition' in American life, which bear debts to the theories of Baudrillard, Jameson, and Fukuyama. The child here is defined by precocity, having been fully integrated into an 'adult' world of apparently ubiquitous consumer capitalism, and seduced by

⁹⁰ Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (London: Vintage, 2000), p.357.

⁹¹ See Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.81.

the now omniscient influence of television. Depictions of children's television watching in authors like Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, and David Foster Wallace show perhaps surprising overlaps with contemporaneous (and broadly conservative) commentators at the time, who decried its deleterious effects on children, particularly centring violent TV and videogame content as the cause of a generation 'growing up too fast, too soon'.⁹² Fears about these 'adultified children' influence the prominence of the 'child prodigy' in authors like Wallace, Carole Maso, Percival Everett and Helen DeWitt. Such children often analogise author's fears about the Information Age—in which a surfeit of information is often accompanied by a dearth of affect or interpersonal connection—but again show a challenge to the latent ideological biases in knowledge more broadly, especially that which is transmitted through pedagogy or canonical literature. The 'Prodigious Child' oftentimes becomes monstrous in its uptake of 'adult' knowledge, and such authors lean upon contemporaneous cultural expressions of 'evil children' in their account of children denied the simpler pleasures of childhood.

Whilst these threads can be better apprehended separately, this study will aim to show points of intersection and overlap between these various conceptions of postmodernism. Again, Pynchon's novels play a central part in all my chapters, not only as the foremost canonized texts of postmodernism, but in their relevance to many different usages of the term. This will become clearer in my last chapter 'The Adult-Child', which will range over all these different 'postmodernisms', locating the presence of regressive or traumatized adults as a common figure in all these varied iterations. The work of Thomas Pynchon and David Foster Wallace, for instance, uses a series of 'childish adults' to depict how youth culture became co-opted by television culture, advertising, and consumer capitalism in the decades that followed, and was thereby drained of much of its subversive potential. The work of Toni Morrison and Louise Erdrich, by contrast, use images of childhood trauma to show a larger scepticism toward teleology and history, particularly the notion of a privileged or 'official' history of American life. As mentioned earlier, this breakdown of the boundaries between 'child' and 'adult' reveals the cultural contingent identities of each, and shows a larger breakdown of the values with which each is defined. These texts show the mid-to-late twentieth century as a time of great uncertainty

⁹² See David Elkind, *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon* (New York: Hachette Books, 1988); Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1982); and Marie Winn, *Children without Childhood* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

toward the notion of how to adequately or safely ‘grow up’, and cast much doubt onto the authority or stability of the ‘adult’ with relation to the child.

In this way, I believe that postmodernist literature can help us to locate both ‘child’ and ‘adult’ as culturally constructed, and elucidate the privileged position the child has come to hold in American cultural discourse over the last half-century or so—as well as the increasingly tenuous position the ‘adult’ has come to hold. Yet I also believe that the child can reflexively help us to understand the ‘postmodernisms’ of postmodernist literature, and nuance several lazy critical commonplaces that still hold surprising sway in some quarters. Amongst them I would highlight: postmodernist literature is apolitical and inwardly turned; it is inimical to sincerity or affect; it is more interested in language than people; and it can best be historicized by sweeping references to the ‘postmodern condition’ or ‘postmodernity’. When acknowledging the shifting contexts of the ‘postmodern’ and trying to broaden its narrow canonization, these arguments quickly reveal themselves to be straw men, and often serve mainly to elevate comparatives like modernism or post-postmodernism. Commentators often intimate that to write ‘postmodernist’ literature is to advocate the term as if attached to a political party (in the humorous conceit of Christopher Butler), whereas it is obvious that most writers hated the term, and that their treatment of ‘the postmodern’ was varied and often adversarial.⁹³ Likewise, postmodernism is often represented as if it emerged out of a vacuum, whereas David Harvey has emphasized that these crises of representation are nothing new, and can be linked persuasively to contexts like the end of empire, the Cold War, and a lengthy ‘crisis of overaccumulation’ that has led to an unprecedented wealth gap in the United States and elsewhere.⁹⁴ Centrally, the intervention of this thesis will therefore not only be to demonstrate the central role children play in the literature of postmodernism, and how these children can help provide a lens to understand the logic of postmodernism, but more broadly to help historicize an all-too-often ahistorical discourse of the ‘postmodern’. Postmodernist literature can thereby not only help us better understand the America of the mid-to-late twentieth century, but help illuminate the paths that led to the world of the 2010s and 2020s.

⁹³ See Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.2.

⁹⁴ See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), pp.327-8.

Chapter 1: The Animate Child

The adjective around which this first chapter is based derives from Thomas Pynchon's *V.* (1963), an early postmodernist novel centrally concerned with an increasingly 'inanimate' world. The drift toward inertia takes many forms in the novel: in characters' collection of 'clockwork' appendages; in the dull office job from which Rachel Owlglass longs to escape; and in the increasing substitution of people for machines—characters develop personal relationships with cars, televisions, even robots. Critics have broadened *V.*'s portrayal of the 'decline of the animate into the inanimate' into discussions of bureaucratization, fascism, entropy (another favourite metaphor of Pynchon's), historicity, Foucauldian theory, media theory, and, indeed, the aesthetics of postmodernism, inasmuch as the author's suspicion of lifelessness is enacted in his texts' essential 'resistance to closure'.¹ Most importantly though, the contrast between the animate and inanimate mirrors the 'struggling resistance to social interpellation' that runs throughout Pynchon's canon, and much postmodernist literature in general.² To be animate is thus not only to be full of life, but a lively freedom as well; here children become an expression of spontaneity, energy, and joy, inimical to that which is mechanical, routinized, circumscribed or controlled.

Literary Antecedents and Historical Contexts

Such a vision of childhood has important antecedents amongst the literary children sketched out in my introduction. The extrication of a child from the culture into which it is born does touch Enlightenment beliefs of the *tabula rasa* (the conception of a newborn's mind as being free from innate ideas or beliefs) though few writers in this chapter would prove sympathetic to the age's subsequent emphasis upon instilling virtue and reason through a good education.³ As will be seen, parental discipline and formal schooling are almost universally reviled and ironized in postmodernist literature, especially early postmodernism. The Animate Child is thus closer to the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who insisted in the later eighteenth century that a lack of reason should be seen not as a deficiency but a natural and even valuable state of life:

¹ Edward Mendelson, *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Pearson Education Ltd, 1976), p.6; Amy J. Elias, *Sublime Desire: History and Post-1960s Fiction* (London; Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press), p.52.

² Simon Malpas and Andrew Taylor, *Thomas Pynchon*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp.1-2.

³ See, for instance Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin (eds.), *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain*, (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2009); and Robert Bremner and John Barnard (eds.), *Children and Youth in America 1600-1865: A Documentary History*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

It is no part of a child's business to know right and wrong, to perceive the reason for a man's duties. [...] Childhood has its own ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling; nothing is more foolish than to try and substitute our ways; and I should no more expect judgment in a ten-year-old child than I should expect him to be five feet high. Indeed, what use would reason be to him at that age?⁴

For Rousseau, childhood was an 'age of gaiety, where one should be free to enjoy 'its games, its pleasures, its amiable instinct'.⁵ His famous treatise *Emile* is explicitly subtitled 'On Education', but depicts a young child who learns best not 'in the stale air of a room' but 'in the middle of a field' where it might 'run and frisk about'.⁶ Such a view of the child as home to natural vitality and a privileged connection with nature found a counterpart in the Romantic child—most famously in the work of poets like William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth—and Wordsworth's 'happy Shepherd-boy' is often implicit in the Animate Child, which is similarly uninhibited by social constraints, and most contented amid the uninhabited corners of the world.⁷ Though some of these postmodernist texts' references to young 'noble savages' who can talk to animals doubtless bear a degree of knowing irony, they still represent an association of the child with that Wordsworthian 'spirit, that [...] rolls through all things'.⁸ Or, in Catherine Stimpson's more simple formulation, 'lovers of children, like lovers of Nature, treasure the animate'.⁹

Other antecedents for this conception of childhood lie in a distinctly American tradition. For one, European Romantics' veneration for the child influenced the work of 'Transcendentalist authors like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Thoreau, who infused the 'Romantic child' with a more pointed emphasis upon personal freedom and rugged individualism. Emerson's call to 'Respect the child' and 'Trespass not on his solitude' figures the young as masters of their own destiny,¹⁰ and reflects contemporary pedagogical currents in the nineteenth century that increasingly saw 'happiness as a goal of education', and 'recogniz[ed] the inner wisdom of the

⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, Or, On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979) p.54.

⁵ Ibid., p.43.

⁶ Ibid., p.42.

⁷ William Wordsworth, 'Ode', in Stephen Gill (ed.), *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), l.35.

⁸ William Wordsworth, 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey', *The Major Works*, ll.100-103.

⁹ Catherine R. Stimpson, 'Pre-Apocalyptic Atavism: Thomas Pynchon's Early Fiction', in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Thomas Pynchon* (New York; New Haven; Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), pp.77-92 (p.83).

¹⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Education', in James E. Cabot (ed.), *Lectures and Biographical Sketches* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1883), pp.101-128 (p.116).

child as something to be honoured and nurtured' instead of censured.¹¹ By the latter decades of the nineteenth century, these currents can be seen within another major source of postmodernism: the irreverent 'Bad Boy' novels of Mark Twain, Georg Wilbur Peck, and Thomas Bailey Aldrich. As Anne Trenskey notes, the children in these novels often possess a Romantic 'unity and harmony with the natural world', but their 'noble savagery' is taken to mischievous extremes, using trickery and pranks to 'ridicule the self-righteously acknowledged morality of family, church and business'.¹² At its height this could generate a full-scale social satire like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), in which the 'coarseness' of the protagonist's slang and roving lifestyle contrasts ironically with the moral values of those trying to 'civilize' him: alcoholics, slave owners, hypocritical churchmen. In less pointed examples, the hijinks and slapstick in the 'Peck's Bad Boy' series simply provided a humorous alternative to the oftentimes moralizing books for children at the time.¹³ The series was immensely popular, leading to five novels, four films and a play, and solidified a character type that would be recapitulated in everything from *Dennis the Menace* (created in 1951) to television shows like *The Simpsons* (created in 1989). Such examples in television and comic-book lore should themselves not be discounted as influences, given the metatextual miscellaneousness of postmodernist literature. Specific sources in children's literature and culture—including comics, fairy tales and 'nonsense literature'—will be treated in more detail in the last part of this chapter.

Importantly, these texts' emphasis upon childhood animacy has more immediate historical resonances. One part of the reason Pynchon's *V.* proves a useful basis for this chapter is that the Animate Child appears most prominently in early postmodernist literature—sometimes called 'proto-postmodernism', or even regarded as a more colourful remnant of literary modernism—which matured amongst the wider social and cultural upheaval associated with the American long Sixties (1955-1973).¹⁴ It was during this time that the term 'postmodernism' was first popularized by critics like Ihab Hassan, Susan Sontag and Leslie Fiedler, to designate what they saw as a new strain of experimentalism that broke away from the

¹¹ John P. Miller, *Transcendental Learning: The Educational Legacy of Alcott, Emerson, Thoreau, Peabody, and Thoreau* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing Inc., 2011), p.6.

¹² Anne Trenskey, 'The Bad Boy in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction', *The Georgia Review*, vol. 27, no. 4 (Winter 1973), pp.503-17 (pp.509, 511).

¹³ See *ibid.*

¹⁴ See Robert Genter, 'Proto-Postmodernism', in Steven Belletto (ed.), *American Literature in Transition 1950-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp.195-208, and Brian McHale's genealogy of postmodernist literature in *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

traditions of American modernism. As Fiedler's essay 'Cross the Border—Close the Gap' posited, the defining feature of this new literature was the collapse of a binary between high art and popular culture, one which simultaneously closes the gap between writer and reader, and 'closes a class, as well as a generation gap'.¹⁵ Consonant with this reference to generational strife, Fiedler's sense of the new fiction of writers like Pynchon, Burroughs and Barth was tied up with an irreverent challenge to the 'elite status' of cultural and political discourse, which reinvigorated 'exhausted' fictions (as Barth would famously call them) with a more 'prophetic and universal' flavour.¹⁶ Early postmodernism can thus be understood alongside much iconography of the age: the experimentation of such writers drew on the more avant-garde urges of fifties' Beat literature, the Do-It-Yourself candour of the folk scene, the utopian idealism of hippie culture, and the defiant rebelliousness of a myriad of protest movements. Indeed, many authors were directly involved with such expressions of the counterculture. William Burroughs straddles the line between Beat writer and early postmodernist, having been friends with Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg before he started to develop his 'cut-up' narratives in the late fifties. Richard Fariña, who introduced Thomas Pynchon to 'Dope/Sex/Rock n' Roll' whilst at Cornell University, also performed as a folksinger and poet in Greenwich Village with Bob Dylan.¹⁷ Ishmael Reed was an early luminary of the Black Arts Movement, and co-founded the *East Village Other*, one of the most influential underground newspapers of the era. Some writers, including John Barth, Steve Katz and Ronald Sukenick, were already in teaching positions in the 1960s, from which they could view the growth of student ferment on University campuses first-hand.

That the child should prove a powerful symbol for such writers should perhaps not be surprising. As Victor Brooks notes, the 1960s was 'a decade where the entire nation was increasingly obsessed with youth'.¹⁸ For one, there were simply a lot of young people—the Baby Boom in the mid-century meant that by 1966 nearly half of the American population was under 25, and *Time* magazine did indeed choose Boomers for its 'Person of the Year' in 1967, praising

¹⁵ Leslie Fiedler, 'Cross the Border—Close the Gap', in *A New Fiedler Reader* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1999), pp.270-94 (pp.287).

¹⁶ Ibid., pp.287, 94; John Barth, 'The Literature of Exhaustion', in *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp.62-76.

¹⁷ See Pynchon's introduction to Richard Fariña's *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up to Me*, (New York; London: Penguin, 1996), p.vi.

¹⁸ Victor Brooks, *Last Season of Innocence: The Teen Experience in the 1960s* (Plymouth, Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), p.36.

them as a ‘highly independent breed’ as ‘a new kind of generation’.¹⁹ To be sure, young Americans in the 1950s and ‘60s enjoyed more freedom than perhaps any other generation in the country’s history; the prosperity of the post-war years, the growth of suburban neighbourhoods, and the growth of ‘permissiveness’ in childrearing manuals meant that most children were apt to be nurtured rather than disciplined, and could be allowed a modest allowance with few responsibilities placed upon them.²⁰ By the latter years of the counterculture, it had become a trite joke that the youthful exuberance of the era could be attributed to Benjamin Spock as much as Timothy Leary; Spiro Agnew joked in 1972 that anti-war protestors were simply ‘spoiled brats’ who ‘needed a good spanking’.²¹ A large part of the ‘youthquake’ of the 1960s did centre upon those old enough to participate directly in some of the political flashpoints of the age, and many scholars have suggested that a recognisable concept of ‘teenagers’ came into focus during this time to connote a turbulent group between the ages of about 15 and 21: these are the ‘Rock n Roll adolescent hoodlums’ who ‘rush into the Louvre and throw acid in the Mona Lisa’s face’ in Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch* (1959).²² As I mentioned in my introduction, such characters (usually identified by their interest in sex or drugs) will only be of peripheral interest to my study, though they do play important roles in the work of Fariña, Burroughs and Barth.

Nevertheless, inasmuch as youth was associated with vibrant progressivism and adulthood with a fusty conservatism inherited from the fifties, childhood represented a cherished extreme. Radical commentators like Timothy Leary, Tuli Kupferberg and Jerry Rubin constantly recapitulated the image of the child in their writing and speeches, advocating a return to a ‘second childhood’ through hallucinogenic drugs, or else praying that ‘insane, stupid, naïve children could save [the world]’ from nuclear holocaust.²³ Activists associated with the hippie movement embraced the term ‘flower child’ to connote their utopian pacificism and Romantic

¹⁹ Patricia Cohen, *In Our Prime: The Invention of Middle Age* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2012), p.217; ‘50 Years Ago This Week: How Young People Changed the World’, *Time* <<https://time.com/4607270/1967-january-6-anniversary/>> [accessed 23 August 2019].

²⁰ Edward K. Spann, *Democracy’s Children: The Young Rebels of the 1960s and the Power of Ideals* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2003), pp.1-20.

²¹ See Erica Etelson, *For Our Own Good: The Politics of Parenting in an Ailing Society* (Berkeley, CA: Left Coast Press, 2010), p.72.

²² William Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009), p.38. On the American teenager, see for instance, Bill Osgerby, ‘Understanding the “Jackpot Market”: Media, Marketing, and the Rise of the American Teenager’, in *The Changing Portrayal of Adolescents in the Media since 1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.27-58.

²³ Tuli Kupferberg, ‘The Love of Politics and the Politics of Love’, *East Village Other* (1-15 May 1967), pp.4-5. See also Peter Braunstein, ‘Forever Young: Insurgent Youth and the Sixties Culture of Rejuvenation’, in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s* ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York; London: Routledge, 2002), pp.243-274.

bond with nature, and enclaves like the Haight-Ashbury commune welcomed children as well as adults to their millenarian ethos.²⁴ Mary Quant and other fashion designers of the era drew on the influence of children's clothes, precipitating trends like the miniskirt, the 'Babydoll' dress, 'Mary Jane' shoes, and the 'Dolly girl' look perfected by Pattie Boyd.²⁵ Popular music of the era, like the Beatles' 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds', Jefferson Airplane's 'White Rabbit', Pink Floyd's 'See Emily Play' and Jimi Hendrix's 'Little Wing', often feature child characters or imagery hewn from child culture to express a 'nostalgia for the innocent vision of the child'—again, often as an analogue to the experience of psychedelic drugs.²⁶ In all of these examples, the child is used as an ironic extreme with which to emphasize youthfulness and the prized 'immaturity' of youth culture, implicitly aligning oneself with the iconoclasm and idealism of the New Left. Moreover, childhood is venerated as a state free of responsibility and expectation, eschewing a stifling emphasis upon family and employment for an immersion in childish fantasy. Perhaps most importantly, to be childish is to be as far from 'adult' as possible.

The counterculture's use of the child to signal contempt for 'maturity' and the values therein connoted is an important thread in early postmodernism. As mentioned, many authors were directly involved with many of these activist groups and protest movements, and so there is substantial slippage between early postmodernist texts and artefacts of the Anti-War Movement, the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement. Specific parallels will be borne out in the course of this chapter, but it is worth noting that many of these artefacts, 'manifestoes' and underground newspapers could easily themselves be understood within the stylistic framework of postmodernism; parts of Jerry Rubin's *Do It! Scenarios of the Revolution* and Abbie Hoffman's *Steal This Book* often tend towards the same irony, irreverence and heterogeneity as novels by Burroughs, Pynchon and Ishmael Reed. They will, then, be of use throughout the first half of this chapter as, if not 'primary texts', useful comparisons to demonstrate the broader cultural context upon which the child of early postmodernism draws. This cultural context is primarily one of a countercultural opposition into the more odious matters of adults—profit, war, patriotic jingoism, elitist 'high art', the Protestant work ethic, and

²⁴ See Ibid., and W.J. Rorabaugh's *American Hippies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²⁵ Jayne Sheridan, *Fashion, Media, Promotion: The New Black Magic* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), pp.143-188.

²⁶ Ian MacDonald, *Revolution in the Head: The Beatles' Records and the Sixties*, 2nd ed. (London: Vintage, 2008), p.216.

white patriarchy.²⁷ As such connotations of the ‘adult’ should alert us, the child shows not only the potential to undercut the authority of ‘tradition’, but therein to illuminate the path toward a happy and more equitable future.

The Rebellious Child: Pynchon, Burroughs and Reed

The Animate Child’s relevance to the social ferment of the age is seen most clearly when child characters rebel against ‘adult’ figures of authority, recapitulating the ‘hallowed sixties binarism’ of ‘rampaging youth rejecting the values of their parents’.²⁸ Such rebellious youngsters loom large in the iconography of the era, from early iterations like *The Wild One* (1953) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) to its constant evocation in rock and pop songs of the later 1960s, and instances like the Berkeley Free Speech Movement (1964) which saw the blossoming of student protest across the country. In early postmodernism, this is often felt as simply as a passing reference to a child eschewing their elders’ influence; one excised section from William Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch* (1959) predicts a generation of children ‘so vicious and vile [...] that every house is an armed camp’, and ‘no father would dream of sleeping without bolting his steel doors and windows and setting the alarm’.²⁹ Later, the Odyssean pastiche that opens Richard Fariña’s *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up To Me* (1966) features a Telemachus that ‘hates his father and aims a kick at his groin’, and Ishmael Reed’s *Free Lance Pall-Bearers* (1967) depicts a temperamental teen who scolds his father for being one of those ‘grown people’, ‘a bunch of rukus-juice drinkers who drop bombs on people’.³⁰ Given the sprawling and oftentimes surrealistic nature of early postmodernist literature, sustained depictions of domesticity and the dynamics of family are admittedly rare, but when these interactions do occur they tend to be laden with clear political or ideological subtext. Here, elder figures are used as a synecdoche for a variety of stifling ‘traditional’ norms inherited from the patriotism and social conservatism of the late ‘40s and ‘50s, and for varied elitist repudiations of ‘immature’ or dangerous cultural forms.

²⁷ See, for instance, Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991); and M.J. Heale, *The Sixties in America: History, Politics and Protest* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001).

²⁸ Braunstein, ‘Forever Young’, p.243.

²⁹ Burroughs, ‘Outtakes: The Examination’, *Naked Lunch*, p.277.

³⁰ Fariña, *Been Down So Long*, p.3; Ishmael Reed, *The Free-Lance Pall Bearers*, (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1999), p.28.

Consonant with the source of this chapter's title, one of the clearest early indicators of childhood animacy comes in Thomas Pynchon's first novel *V*. The ninth chapter of the novel consists of 'The Confessions of Fausto Maijstral', a long letter by a Maltese priest recounting his experiences during World War Two, during which Malta was under bombing raids from the German Luftwaffe. This letter is itself interpolated with the additional 'found text' of his diary, which he comments upon ironically as if they were written by several different speakers (Fausto I, II, III and IV). Such varied and oftentimes confusing metaleptic layers are given coherence by Maijstral's daughter Paolo, to whom the letter is addressed, and about whom much of the diary is written. Recounting her childhood in Malta during the War, Maijstral talks of his daughter amongst 'a roistering crew of children' drawn to 'dirt, noise and roughnecking', who spent most of their time impersonating Spitfires, 'swinging down from the trees', and 'jumping off the ruined ends of jetties into the sea'.³¹ Even amid the bombing raids of real planes, their natural energy is shown to be resistant to the 'adult' contingencies that surround them; the sounds of nearby explosions are 'only amusement' to them, and their game of 'Spitfire' shows an irreverently 'childish' reinterpretation of the realities of wartime.³² Instead of being subjugated to these violent 'adult' forces, the children of Malta become emblematic of a vitality undimmed by the paucity of their surroundings ('poetry in a vacuum', as Magistral has it), and their unsupervised play also reveals itself to be resistant to adult control.³³ Indeed, Pynchon repeatedly emphasizes the extent to which the children are separate from the adults entirely: by their 'private routes, mostly underground', and secret 'screech[ing] songs, and Fausto opines that 'the young [...] were creating a discrete world' of childish play, one which might be more 'real' than the adults' own.³⁴

Pynchon's evocation of the generation gap clearly keys into the context of the time. When Fausto predicts that children born in wartime 'will be a strange generation' he is essentially talking about early Boomers, and the children of the island show a nascent iteration of the spirit of the long Sixties.³⁵ Centrally, their immersion in the harsh realities of wartime leaves them wary of the values of their parents' and teachers—those whose 'betrayal and hypocrisy' had put them in the war to begin with.³⁶ Thus it is only natural that when they are met with the bizarre

³¹ Thomas Pynchon, *V*. (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.331-3.

³² *Ibid.*, p.311.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.332.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Pynchon, *V*., p.310.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.339.

‘sermons’ of the ‘Bad Priest’ (one of the many guises of the protean figure ‘V’), ‘the children were not, of course, having any’.³⁷ For one, this speaks to contemporary concerns about what Hugh McLeod has termed the ‘religious crisis of the 1960s’, alluding to the decade’s ‘sharp decline in religious participation and belief’, especially amongst young people.³⁸ The Boomer generation’s uneasy relationship with ‘traditional’ Christian values—often viewed as inimical to ‘new values’ that emphasized ‘greater individualism, more personal freedom, and more tolerance of diversity’ in the later ‘50s and ‘60s—is mirrored in the children’s incredulity toward the Bad Priest, who recommends that they renounce ‘sensual extremes’ and join the priesthood. Even so, the Maltese children’s rejection of the Bad Priest registers not so much articulate aversion to Christian dogma (V’s strange teachings resemble ‘no consistent philosophy’), but to V’s call to check their play, and to emulate the stoic and lifeless ‘rock of their island’.³⁹ Like the ‘clockwork’ V. herself, such inanimacy is intolerable to children; Maijstral’s narrative climaxes with a description of the children first ‘mocking’ and then ‘disassembl[ing]’ the Bad Priest, who is found to be mostly formed from prosthetic appendages and a mechanical ‘under-structure’.⁴⁰

The Maltese children’s violent rejection of V hints toward their understanding of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ not as one of balance, but one of compression and resistance. The children are said to see ‘vectors of evil’ as if ‘radial arrows [...] pointing inward’, trying to surround and delimit their autonomy, and Pynchon’s evocation of the child as forming part of a ‘Manichean’ struggle between opposing forces is significant.⁴¹ It would be hard to argue that *V.* is a novel centrally about religion, or centrally about children, but the presentation of a child’s rebellion against dominating or inculcating ‘adult’ forces—usually described by an adult narrator—forms a microcosm of the dialectic of autonomy and authority which runs throughout much early postmodernism. Oftentimes this explicitly keys into the issues of the day, as in Pynchon’s 1964 short story ‘The Secret Integration’, in which the image of the childish animacy is again prominent. Ostensibly, the story centres upon a group of young boys and their attempts to ‘interfere with the scheming of grownups’ through various pranks and hijinks.⁴² As with the

³⁷ Ibid., p.340.

³⁸ See Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); David A. Roozen, Jackson W. Carroll, and Wade Clark Roof, ‘Fifty Years of Religious Change in the United States’, in Roozen, Carroll, and Roof (eds.), *The Post-War Generation and Establishment Religion: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2018), pp.59-86 (p.59).

³⁹ Ibid., p.340.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.342.

⁴¹ Pynchon, *V.*, p.338

⁴² Thomas Pynchon, ‘The Secret Integration’, in *Slow Learner* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.140-193 (p.144).

children of war-torn Malta, these suburban children betray a humble resourcefulness, creating a hideout in an abandoned manor house and a ‘patched up’ boat, the *S.S. Leak*.⁴³ Moreover, they again have a penchant for disobedience against their elders; the boys’ insurrectionary group is codenamed the ‘Inner Junta’, and their end-goal ‘Operation A’ seems to consist of a full-scale rebellion against their schoolteachers, inspired by the slave uprising in *Spartacus*.⁴⁴ Parents and teachers imply a world of prescribed and delineated spaces—a ‘scaled-up world [...] lived in without’ their children—whereas the youngsters are bound to nothing: the ‘patron saint’ of the Junta is the drifter Crazy Sue Dunham, and the senior member Grover, a ‘radio ham’, uses his technological expertise to flit in and out of adults’ frequencies.⁴⁵ David Seed and David Cowart have both emphasized the story’s debt to Mark Twain’s rugged child heroes, and like *Huckleberry Finn* the rebellious children of ‘The Secret Integration’ contrast favourably to ‘the moral failings of the adults’.⁴⁶ Whereas the black child Carl Barrington is accepted in the group without question (and the other boys even find it hard to understand a joke about his being ‘coloured’), Carl’s parents are made to endure constant haranguing from the community—and, in the overheard racial slurs of the boys’ households, Pynchon implies that their own parents are fully complicit.⁴⁷

The perspective of the child here provides an ironic lens with which to view the action recounted, and implies that the kids’ humorous distrust of parents and teachers mask much more weighty generational strife. Published in the same year as the Civil Rights Act, Pynchon implies the distance left to travel to eradicate the bigotries of small-town America, whilst using the callow naiveté of the children to register incredulity toward the prejudices of an older generation, and the fear that these children will be corrupted by these ‘adult’ beliefs. Admittedly, few other texts associated with early postmodernism seem so openly didactic, though the imperative to protect children from the control of their elders omnipresent; even in one of the most convoluted depictions of resistance to a ‘controlling power’, in Burroughs’ Nova trilogy (1961-7), all babies are given a ‘lifescrypt’ by ‘absentee proprietors’ which will determine the course of their life.⁴⁸ Predictably, parents are in on the ruse; they ‘act under orders [...] to install the indicated

⁴³ Ibid., pp.163-4.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp.152-5.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.143; p.151; p.148

⁴⁶ See David Seed, *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (London: MacMillan, 1988) pp.63-9; and David Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon and the Dark Passages of History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), p.30.

⁴⁷ See Pynchon, ‘The Secret Integration’, pp.161-2, 147, 186-8.

⁴⁸ William Burroughs, *Nova Express* (London: Penguin, 2010), p.49; *The Soft Machine* (London: Flamingo, 1995), p.110.

stops that punctuate the life script', ensuring that their children will not break their predestined fate.⁴⁹ Burroughs concept of 'life-scripts' is not only an ironic reimagining of DNA's 'encoded biological message', as Alex Houen argues, but also gestures to the concept of the *tabula rasa*, picturing the child as a blank script in danger of being 'written' by a previous generation. The novels' depiction of 'Operation Rewrite' thereby represents both a fictional counterpart to Burroughs' 'cut-up' technique (with which he would cut up and rearrange blocks of text at random) and a zeal to save a new generation from being corrupted by the values of the past.⁵⁰ Again, the child is not centred as a participant in the action, and the medley of 'controlling forces' reaches far beyond just parents and teachers—the trilogy imagines an interplanetary conspiracy involving an alien syndicate called the 'Nova Mob', a multinational corporation called Trak Enterprises, a group of Mayan priests, and a medley of other bureaucracies and businesses—but their desire to turn all human beings into identical 'replicas' of each other again mirrors a youthful resistance to 'adult' conformity.⁵¹

As Burroughs and Pynchon make clear, this 'conformity' represents not just a threat to animacy, but submission to a dangerous set of backward 'adult' beliefs that tend toward social conservatism, and oftentimes outright prejudice. In conjunction with the concept of the child's 'life-script', Burroughs' emphasis upon language as a method of control analogises the process of culture and language acquisition in children (especially inherited implicit bias), anticipating Foucauldian theory in its assumption of identity as culturally constructed from without.⁵² This will become more relevant to the depiction of the Preterite Child in the following chapter, in which the vitality of the child often cannot save them from being co-opted (or 'infected', in Burroughs' terms) by the more toxic elements of their culture. Most important to note here is the extent to which the diffuse 'controlling' powers that act upon the individual are oftentimes linked to adults' influence upon children, and the proliferation of the inanimate.⁵³ Like Pynchon, Burroughs is deeply suspicious of the intrusion of 'IBM machine[s]' into human life, and the lure

⁴⁹ Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*, p.110.

⁵⁰ Alex Houen, *Powers of Possibility: Experimental American Writing since the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.114.

⁵¹ Burroughs, *Nova Express*, pp.48-9.

⁵² For a good overview of the development of implicit bias in children, see Tobias Raabe and Andreas Beelmann, 'Development of Ethnic, Racial, and National Prejudice in Childhood and Adolescence: A Multinational Meta-Analysis of Age Differences', *Child Development*, Vol. 82, No. 6 (November/December 2011), pp.1715-1737; for a Foucauldian perspective on children's education, see Stephen J. Ball (ed.), *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

⁵³ William Burroughs, *The Ticket that Exploded* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), p.43.

of a 'computerized Garden of Delights' as opposed to real human interaction or empathy.⁵⁴ Moreover, Burroughs hopes that children might be immune from such mechanization, and, as would he would later make clear in *The Wild Boys* (1971), he believed youth would play a central fight against control.⁵⁵ The eponymous heroes of the novel are a gang (and eventually an army) of children and teenagers set on waging war against the 'police machine', 'all dogmatic verbal systems', and 'the family unit and its cancerous expansion into tribes, countries, [and] nations'.⁵⁶ They include:

...glider boys with bows and laser guns, rollerskate boys—blue jockstraps and steel helmets, eighteen-inch bowie knives—naked blowgun boys long hair down their backs [...], slingshot boys, knife throwers, bowmen, bare-hand fighters, shaman boys who ride the wind and those who have control over snakes and dogs, boys skilled in bone-pointing and Juju magic [...], boys who call the locusts and the fleas, desert boys shy as little sand foxes, dream boys who see each other's dreams and the silent boys of the Blue Desert.⁵⁷

Here, Burroughs deftly integrates Romantic notions of the child as 'Mighty prophet', who can 'see [...] dreams' and communicate with animals, with more immediate anxieties in the 1960s about youth violence.⁵⁸ Perhaps unsurprisingly, the student insurgency of the decade (as well as the simple fact of a younger population) did yield a huge increase in juvenile offending, much of which was actively encouraged by countercultural mouthpieces.⁵⁹ Burroughs' image of an army of 'little boys armed with slingshots and scout knives' seems ironically picayune, but resonates with Abbie Hoffman's recommendation that the slingshot would be 'the ideal street weapon for the swarms of little Davids that are out to down the Goliaths of Pigdom'.⁶⁰ With this in mind, *The Wild Boys'* prediction that a violent youth movement would be in active warfare with the U.S. government within the decade probably seemed an entirely possible prospect.

The analogies to youth rebellion in *The Wild Boys* are iterated even more clearly in the early novels of Ishmael Reed. Though the African American author was loath to be compared to

⁵⁴ Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*, pp.106-7; *The Ticket That Exploded*, p.5.

⁵⁵ In *Naked Lunch*, for instance, he pictures a matrix of television antennae 'hover[ing]' over 'lifeproof houses', where the 'only the young bring anything in'; see Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, p.11.

⁵⁶ William Burroughs, *The Wild Boys* (New York: Grove Press, 1971), p.140

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.147.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* See also Wordsworth, 'Ode', l.115.

⁵⁹ See Cathy Spatz Widom, Joan McCord, Nancy A. Crowell (eds.), *Juvenile Crime, Juvenile Justice* (National Academies Press, 2001).

⁶⁰ Burroughs, *The Wild Boys*, p.128; Abbie Hoffman, *Steal This Book* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995), p.160. Hoffman's *Steal This Book* is clearly written with a youthful audience in mind, and offers tips on everything from disseminating high school newspapers to making pipe bombs.

the 'junky' Burroughs (whom he regarded as part of 'a movement of racist writers and white critics called the Beat Movement') Reed's stated aim of 'messing up the script' bears similarities to 'Operation Rewrite', and both are enacted in the linguistic heterogeneity and paratactic nature of the authors' writing.⁶¹ In Reed's first novel *The Free-Lance Pall Bearers*, children feature as a counterweight to the monolithic dictator HARRY SAM, the 'Nazarene Priests' who enact his will, and the novel's protagonist Bukka Doopeyduck, who has been taken in by the racist teachings of their leader. Early in the novel a 'Nazarene apprentice' is put in a 'coo-coo daze' by two violent children, and later Doopeyduck is horrified to see his neighbour's son call HARRY SAM a 'smelly man who's been holed up in the John for thirty years'.⁶² The latter's depiction of a young boy with 'hair draped about his shoulder' and 'a "Flower-Power" button' on his t-shirt wears its countercultural connotations openly, especially when the largely allegorical narrative is interrupted by the boy's warning that 'it's going to be curtains for the generation that gave us Richard Nixon'.⁶³ Admittedly, this boy is labelled as a 'teenager' as well as 'a child', and his rebelliousness unrest tends toward an older, more articulate opposition to authority than many of the children mentioned earlier. Even so, Reed's depiction of youthful unrest informs the children of his next novel, *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* (1969), a 'Hoo-Doo Western' centred upon a black cowboy called The Loop Garoo Kid. The town of Yellow Back Radio is inhabited entirely by children; tired of their elders 'ordering [them] around' the young have forcibly 'chased them out of town'.⁶⁴ The novel recalls Pynchon's 'The Secret Integration' in its sustained contrast between rebellious children of the novel and a cast of grown-up alcoholics, profiteers, and religious charlatans.⁶⁵ The adults of Yellow Back Radio are indeed identified as 'the Banker', 'the Marshall', 'the Doctor', 'Preacher Boyd', and a drunken leader called 'Drag Gibson' who literally 'embrac[es] his property' and 'kisses his holdings' every night.⁶⁶ By comparison, the children of Yellow Back Radio only to be 'free to dream' of 'The Seven Cities of Cibola', a fabled land without 'gurus monarchs leader cops tax collectors jails matriarchs patriarchs and all the

⁶¹ See Walt Shepperd, 'When State Magicians Fail: An Interview with Ishmael Reed', in Bruce Dick and Amritjit Singh (eds.), *Conversations with Ishmael Reed* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1995), pp.3-13 (p.3), and John O' Brein, 'Ishmael Reed', in Dick and Singh (ed.), *Conversations with Ishmael Reed*, pp.14-24 (p.22).

⁶² Reed, *Free-Lance Pall Bearers*, pp.19, 28-9.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.29.

⁶⁴ Ishmael Reed, *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (London: Allison & Busby, 1995) p.16.

⁶⁵ As well as recalling, by extension, the work of Mark Twain, to whom Reed was often compared. See Ishmael Reed, 'Mark Twain's Hairball', in Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors (eds.), *A New Literary History of America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp.380-4.

⁶⁶ Reed, *Yellow Back Radio*, p.19.

other galoots who in cahoots have made the earth a pile of human bones under the feet of wolves'.⁶⁷

The diffuse medley of authority figures in *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down*, which again recalls Burroughs, is even joined by the end of the novel by 'The Pope', recruited to maintain order after the adults violently retake the town. Even more than the Maltese children who dismantle the 'Bad Priest' in *V.*, satirical critiques of Christianity are essential to Reed's literary project. As Jeffrey Ebbesen and Robert Elliot Fox have emphasized, Reed often returns to Christianity as the focal point of a white, Western tradition that 'author[s] a cultural narrative, [by] erasing traces of influence and difference'.⁶⁸ One of the main sites of this erasure is that of non-Western systems of belief, especially African diaspora religions, and Reed goes to some length in his subsequent novel *Mumbo Jumbo* to trace the Christian theft of traditions from black 'Osirian' culture in Egypt.⁶⁹ Like Native American religions, these are traditions the Christian church would come to dismiss as 'superstition', and it so it seems significant that the children of Yellow Back Radio both 'dress in the attire of Plains Indians', and ally themselves with Hoodoo-loving Loop.⁷⁰ Their rebellious nature draws them away not just from stifling adult authority, but from more broadly 'authoritative' systems of belief—capitalism, Christianity, and conventional medicine—toward more marginal traditions that seem to demand less in the way of human exploitation. It is for this reason that only the children (they 'of innocent motives') are able to find the fabled 'Seven Cities of Cibola', whereas the money-obsessed Drag Gibson is eaten by a drove of pigs, and the Pope is chased out of town by The Loop Garoo Kid.⁷¹ Free of the various adult influences acting upon them, the children are free to exit 'arm in arm [...] bopping toward the gleaming cities in the distance'.⁷²

The utopian zeal with which Reed's novel ends betrays his immersion in, and sympathies with, the youth movements of the later sixties. Compared to Burroughs, whose main involvement in US student protest came with his attendance at the violent 1968 DNC, and

⁶⁷ Reed, *Yellow Back Radio*, pp.27-8.

⁶⁸ Jeffrey Ebbesen, *Postmodernism and Its Others* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p.23.

⁶⁹ See Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (St Ives: Penguin, 2017), pp.161-91; see also Helen Lock, 'A Man's Story is His Gris-gris: Ishmael Reed's Neo-Hoodoo Aesthetic and the African-American Tradition', *South Central Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring 1993), pp.67-77.

⁷⁰ Reed, *Yellow Back Radio*, p.15;

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.24; pp.167-73.

⁷² Reed, *Yellow Back Radio*, p.174.

Pynchon, whose reclusiveness makes it difficult to track his whereabouts during the 1960s, Reed was a far more active figure within countercultural circles.⁷³ Whilst in New York he was part of the Umbra movement, a precursor to the Black Arts Movement, and he co-founded *The East Village Other* in 1965, which became a regular home for provocateurs like Abbie Hoffman, Tuli Kupferberg, Jerry Rubin, and Coca Crystal. By 1968, Reed was also teaching students at the University of California, and he expressed the same year a sincere belief that protestors would be ‘overthrow the government [...] through a bloodless coup’, citing the Yippies’ famous ‘levitation’ of the Pentagon as the kind of ‘surrealis[tic]’ demonstration that could be successful.⁷⁴ Rubin’s Yippies will be discussed more in the next section, but it is worth noting for now the similarities between Reed’s and Rubin’s use of the Animate Child. Just as the evil, inculcating adults of Yellow Back Radio are forced out by the ‘dream[ing]’ children, Rubin describes the whole of the New Left as ‘a predestined, pissed-off child’, determined to escape the ‘material’ values of the generation previous:

The 1950’s were the turning point in the history of Amerika. Those who grew up before the 1950’s live today in a mental world of Nazism, concentration camps, economic depression and Communist dreams Stalinized. A pre-1950’s child who can still dream is very rare. Kids who grew up in the post-1950’s live in a world of supermarkets, color TV commercials, guerrilla war, international media, psychedelics, rock ‘n’ roll and moon walks. For us nothing is impossible. We can do anything. This generation gap is the widest in history.⁷⁵

Rubin’s *Do It! Scenarios of the Revolution* (1970) is as much an early postmodernist novel as a political manifesto, featuring a collage of prose, poetry, images, cartoons and newspaper clippings. By its end, the ‘generation gap’ between child and adult precipitates a ‘mass breakdown of authority, mass rebellion [and] total anarchy’, when ‘Kids will lock parents out of their suburban homes and turn them into guerrilla bases’.⁷⁶ This ‘Apocalypse’—which Rubin colourfully represents in photomontage—will leave the United States with ‘no more jails, courts [...] schools or churches’, a utopian ‘Yippie island in a vast sea of yippie love’.⁷⁷

⁷³ See William Burroughs, ‘The Coming of the Purple Better One’, *Exterminator!* (St Ives: Penguin, 2008) pp.93-109; and Mathew Winston, ‘The Quest for Pynchon’, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (October 1975), pp.278-287.

⁷⁴ Shepperd, ‘When State Magicians Fail’, p.13.

⁷⁵ Jerry Rubin, *Do It! Scenarios of the Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), pp.90-1.

⁷⁶ Rubin, *Do It!*, pp.253-6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Though the Animate Child can hardly be said to represent such unabashed idealism, it can be seen to be entwined with the millenarian prophesying of the decade. More so than a figure of new hope for the future, the child is of use in these texts to collapse a medley of political, ideological and social oppositions into purely generational qualms, and to express energetic disdain for a backward set of traditional values. The irreverence of the child also saves these texts from becoming overly moralistic, didactic or sanctimonious; the children in *V.* and *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* could not be said to be nonviolent, and their view of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ mostly consists of disdain for those forces that would check their play. It is notable here that the fun-loving children of *Yellow Back Radio* contrast not only the greed of the adults but the sanctimonious ‘neo-social realist’ Bo Shmo, who writes ‘suffering books [...] about [his] old neighbourhood and how hard it was’.⁷⁸ Shmo recalls figures in Reed’s *The Free-Lance Pall Bearers* and *Mumbo Jumbo* who use stories of ‘culturally deprived children’ and ‘the mores of segregated housing projects’ to affect a self-aggrandizing moralism, and Reed emphasized his hatred of the ‘talking android[s]’ used both by the government and factions of the counterculture to propagandize their causes.⁷⁹ The child figures as a useful tool in this sense as a symbol of lively but equivocal resistance to control, which, though consonant with the left-leaning values of the counterculture, represents no articulate political stance. Indeed, their main quality is often their lack of seriousness or solemnity; Reed posits that one of the main evils of Christianity is simply that there is ‘nowhere [...] an account or portrait of Christ laughing’, and his children in *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* only trust the Loop Garoo Kid because he can perform circus tricks.⁸⁰ Likewise, the children of ‘The Secret Integration’ are wary of machines because they ‘can’t [...] play jokes’, and they idolize the real-life drifter Sue Dunham, who was known for her ‘Wild Pranks and Witty Rejoinders’.⁸¹ Despite the iconoclasm of the child, its subversive energy remains primarily geared toward playfulness, consonant with the irreverent style of early postmodernism more generally.

⁷⁸ Reed, *Yellow Back Radio*, pp.34-6.

⁷⁹ O’ Brien, ‘Ishmael Reed’, p.22; Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, p.17; *The Free-Lance Pall Bearers*, p.20.

⁸⁰ Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*, p.97.

⁸¹ Victoria Clemens, “‘A Powerful and Thrilling Voice’: The Significance of Crazy Bet’, in Lucinda Damon-Bach and Victoria Clemens (ed.), *Catharine Maria Sedgwick: Critical Perspectives* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2003), pp.40-52 (p.44).

The Creative Child: Fariña, Brautigan, Ross and Barth

The comic and imaginative energy of the child is often brought to the fore in the work of other early postmodernist writers. Though often still brought into conflict with some figure of authority, these children are revered less for their zeal in resisting ‘controlling forces’ than their mischievous delight in undercutting the wisdom of their elders through pranks, and their love of play and games. This tends to remove some of the barb of the children shown in Burroughs and Reed, and implies more fidelity to the idea of childhood innocence. Alongside the disobedient the children of *Do It!*, for instance, Rubin emphasises a childish penchant for fun and humour consonant with the Yippies’ essentially nonviolent resistance. He narrates his having spent time in the Haight-Ashbury hippie commune and ‘play[ing] out our fantasies like children’, pining for a time when ‘you can be whatever you want to be [...] cowboys and Indians, pirates, kings, gypsies and Greeks’.⁸² Childhood is figured as a time of lost freedom and imagination, since ‘Babies are zen masters, curious about everything’, whereas ‘Adults are serious and bored’.⁸³ Large scale political change becomes as simple as ‘do[ing] what we always wanted to do as children’; with a slight countercultural twist, Wordsworth’s famous insistence that the ‘Child is the Father of the Man’ can be seen here to form a kind of Yippie praxis.⁸⁴ The calculated immaturity of their pranks (including nominating a pig for president, and attending a Congress hearing dressed as Santa Claus) did bear out Rubin’s claim that ‘everything the yippies [did was] aimed at three-to-seven year olds’, and *Do It!* predicted that ‘the leaders of the revolution [would be] seven-year olds’.⁸⁵ Other Yippie figures voiced similar sentiments: Tuli Kupferberg proclaimed that only ‘stupid, insane, naïve children [...] can save us’, for instance, and published several collections of famous figures’ baby photos.⁸⁶ The fascinating *As They Were* series is not only a great political leveller—a youthful Adolf Hitler sits alongside John Lennon, and Fidel Castro is next to Queen Elizabeth II—but shows an idealized view of childhood as a time of universal purity before one’s joyful impulses are curbed by the various exigencies of adulthood.

A similarly Romantic bent to the Animate Child characterizes Richard Fariña’s *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up To Me* and Richard Brautigan’s *Trout Fishing in America*, published in

⁸² Rubin, *Do It!*, p.55.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.212.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.122.

⁸⁵ See Rubin, *Do It!*, pp.89-90. The very name Yippie acted both as an imaginative acronym for ‘Youth International Party’ and an exclamation of joy (‘yippee!’).

⁸⁶ Kupferberg, ‘The Love of Politics and the Politics of Love’, pp.4-5.

1966 and 1967 respectively. In the former, the ‘groovy Odysseus’ Gnosso Papadopoulos encounters six young girls on David Grun’s idyllic farm; appropriate to their rustic surroundings, the sisters are all named after types of bird and spend much of the episode playing around a maypole.⁸⁷ Like Rubin, Gnosso is shown to admire children for being ‘turned on all the time’, and later engages in a playful dress-up with the Grun daughters when they ‘become wary of grown-up talk’.⁸⁸ Such imaginative children also feature at the heart of Brautigan’s novella: the unnamed baby girl of the narrator, and the young narrator-as-child in a series of interpolated memories. Like Rousseau’s Emile, this child’s best education is conducted outdoors; the narrator remembers that his ‘classrooms were close to the shore’, ‘his books were a pair of Sears Roebuck boots’, and he gained ‘a fellowship’ in catching water bugs.⁸⁹ Similarly, his infant daughter later manages to embarrass a ‘third-year student in engineering at the University of Montana’ by catching more than his ‘elaborate’ fishing gadgets with her bare hands.⁹⁰ The children’s connection with nature (by which I mean the ‘animate’ world of flora and fauna) seems consonant with both a blossoming strain of hippie environmentalism and a more general fidelity toward what William Stroup has called the ‘cosmic prowess’ of the Romantic child.⁹¹ These visions of the child show a similar sprightly energy to the rebellious children mentioned earlier, but this energy is turned toward ends creative rather than destructive. In one scene, the narrator of *Trout Fishing in America* remembers ‘being called in before the principal’ for vandalising first-graders’ clothes with the words ‘Trout Fishing in America’; here, an act which could easily seem cruel or blustering is instead presented as an attempt to ‘complete [the younger children] and give them a bit of class’.⁹² Particularly since the words they choose form the recurrent basis of Brautigan’s novel—‘Trout Fishing in America’ is presented as if a discrete character who narrates sections of text—Brautigan draws comparison between the prank and the novel’s own linguistic experimentation, as if it should best be understood in proximity to a child’s imagination.

Comparing the aesthetic logic of early postmodernism with children’s writing (and writing for children) is a useful way to think about much early postmodernism, and more specific examples will be treated in the last section of this chapter. Given the oftentimes dense

⁸⁷ Fariña, *Been Down So Long*, p.225-7.

⁸⁸ Fariña, *Been Down So Long*, pp.71, 227.

⁸⁹ Richard Brautigan, *Trout Fishing in America* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2014), p.51.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp.65, 79

⁹¹ William Stroup, ‘The Romantic Child’, *Literature Compass*, 1:1 (2004), pp.1-5 (p.2).

⁹² Brautigan, *Trout Fishing*, pp.37-8.

metatextuality and intertextuality of these novels, one might be tempted to take such clear signposts toward previous iterations of the literary child as pastiche, and they do bear some ironic energies. In the clash between their idealized inheritance and their natural tendency toward irreverence, this ironic humour seems only natural; Gnossos' conversations with the 'cosmic' child are often prompted more by drug use than anything else, and Brautigan turns his whimsical descriptions even to the baby's 'thimblefuls of lavender vomit'.⁹³ Nevertheless, it is surprising the extent to which early postmodernists hold a large degree of reverence for the Romantic child, particularly since it contains an imagination that transcends the material constraints of their social world. In an early chapter of *Trout Fishing in America* the narrator recalls a young friend who, though growing up undercut in abject poverty, would sustain himself by 'sit[ting] around in an abandoned chicken house reading old comic-books and drinking a gallon of Kool-Aid'.⁹⁴ The description of his preparation of the admixture ('a romance and a ceremony') ironically evokes the Eucharist, and the implicit paucity of his surroundings are transformed by 'his own Kool-Aid reality', with which he is 'able to illuminate himself'.⁹⁵ The 'Kool-Aid wino' recalls the earlier children of Pynchon's *V.*, whose play does not waver amid German bombing raids; they too can '[create] a discrete world' apart from the contingencies that surround them in their secret play and games.⁹⁶

Such admiration for the undimmed vitality of childhood even appears amid the hyper-technological San Narciso of Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, when Oedipa Mass chances across a group of childhood in Golden Gate Park:

The night was empty of all terror for them, they had inside their circles an imaginary fire, and needed nothing but their own unpenetrated sense of community. They knew about the post horn, but nothing of the chalked game Oedipa had seen on the sidewalk. You used only one image and it was a jump-rope game, a little girl explained: you stepped alternately in the loop, the bell, and the mute, while your girlfriend sang:

Tristoe, Tristoe, one, two, three,

Turning taxis from across the sea...⁹⁷

⁹³ See Fariña, *Been Down So Long*, pp.69-71; Brautigan, *Trout Fishing*, p.78.

⁹⁴ Brautigan, *Trout Fishing*, pp.8-10.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Pynchon, *V.*, p.332.

⁹⁷ Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.89-90

In one sense, this scene functions as a bathetic and irreverent account of the mysterious 'Trystero' organization at the heart of the novel, potentially more of a children's game than a dangerous conspiracy. Yet the reference to the children's 'unpenetrated sense of community', particularly when contrasted with Oedipa's oftentimes isolating quest, also betrays an admiration for the durability and power of their imagination.⁹⁸ Compared to the yoke of Pynchon's heroine, whose obsession with discovering the 'true nature' of the 'Trystero' leaves her alone and isolated, the children are contentedly able to 'warm their hands at an imaginary fire'.⁹⁹ Again, we see a nostalgic glimpse at childhood games in opposition to an alienating 'adult' world (particularly the inanimate 'printed circuitboard' of San Narciso), and the author's relativistic emphasis upon discrete 'realities' also speaks to a larger 'ontological turn' with which Brian McHale has distinguished postmodernism from modernism.¹⁰⁰ Here, the perspective of the child in play anticipates Oedipa Maas' own question—'Shall I project a world?'—and thereby prophesies the limits of her 'adult' knowledge, which is stuck in the desire to 'solve' or 'decode' the mystery of the 'Trystero'.¹⁰¹ Particularly as the children seem to already have a privileged awareness of the organization unknown to Oedipa, child's play is shown not just to be a flight from reality so much as an acknowledgement of the illusory nature of singular 'reality' or stable meaning, showing the point at which 'epistemological uncertainty becomes [...] ontological plurality'.¹⁰² Like the more rebellious iterations of the Animate Child, we can easily see how this can be mapped onto the millenarian currents of the 1960s: the child here represents a radical scepticism toward the 'traditional' or 'adult' values and ways of knowing, and the potential for new pathways of thinking.

It is worth exploring that Pynchon's depiction of the young children in Golden Gate Park, as well as Fariña and Brautigan's depiction of childish purity and imagination, accounts for girls as well as boys. Though young girls and boys in early postmodernism are often collapsed into unsexed 'children' (usually by a young adult narrator, as mentioned), there is a clear bias toward masculinity in more rebellious iterations, consonant with their 'Bad Boy' antecedents in Twain and Peck. As will be discussed more in my next chapter, the implicit division between girlish purity and boyish mischief remains a live issue in discussions of fictional and non-fictional children, and the division proves representative of the energies of a countercultural Left which,

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.90.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.13. See also Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (Taylor and Francis, 1987), pp.9-10.

¹⁰¹ Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, p.60.

¹⁰² McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, p.11.

despite sympathies toward ‘sexual liberation’, remained almost entirely dominated by male mouthpieces, as Sara Evans so forcefully pointed out.¹⁰³ This is further borne out in the canon of early postmodernism, in which women are conspicuous by their absence; much of the best-known literature written by women associated with the counterculture was poetry, and subsequent novelists who display stylistic traits of postmodernism—including Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara, Erica Jong and Kathy Acker—tend to display children in a far more ambivalent light.¹⁰⁴ One notable exception comes in Fran Ross’s *Oreo* (1974), a playful picaresque that transplants a Black-Jewish girl into the myth of Theseus. Accordant with the novel’s dislocation of Classical myth, the mind of the child is again used as an irreverent or transformative lens with which to view the world; as an infant, she courageously mauls a ‘live lion’ (unbeknownst to her, actually a fur coat), which foretells her ‘heroic’ status to come.¹⁰⁵ Significantly, this heroic strength betrays ingenuity as much as physical prowess, and the titular protagonist’s rebellious nature is often displayed in her mastery of the ‘nuance and cadence, the juice and pith’ of language.¹⁰⁶ This is used partly to contextualise Ross’ own play of language, which relays *Oreo*’s thoughts in a complex commixture of Black dialect and Yiddish slang, but the child is also shown to use her sharp ‘WIT’ (an ironic acronym for her ‘system of self-defense [called] the Way of the Interstitial Thrust’) to best the inept adults that beset her quest to find her father.

Tellingly, as she hits puberty these adult antagonists often take the form of concupiscent men. As a fourteen-year-old she tricks the leering Dr Jaffert into a clandestine encounter with a neighbour, before leaving him with only with a ‘quick shu-kik to the groin’ and a promise to ‘never again annoy innocent young women [...] with his snortings and slaverings’;¹⁰⁷ at fifteen, she tricks a pimp called Parnell, whose attempts to pair her with a client are scuppered by a ‘false hymen made of elasticium’, against which his member ‘boing-ed off [...] as if it were a tiny trampoline’.¹⁰⁸ Though *Oreo* is by now a pubescent fifteen-year-old, the emphasis Ross places upon her virginity, alongside *Oreo*’s play of docility, makes her seem notably conversant in

¹⁰³ See Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Random House, 1979); and Rochelle Gatlin, *American Women Since 1945* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1987).

¹⁰⁴ As mentioned in my introduction, studies of postmodernism tend to focus upon a canon of male writers, especially in studies of American fiction.

¹⁰⁵ Fran Ross, *Oreo* (London: Picador, 2018), pp.53-55.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.37.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.56-61.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.159-61.

matters of sex. Growing up she had been ‘an inveterate crotch-watcher’, to the point where she can distinguish ‘capons’ from ‘cockerels’, and makes several quips about Kirk’s penis (‘he could have used a zeppelin for a condom’).¹⁰⁹ For a novel that endows the protagonist with knowledge of the ‘oppression of women’ as a young child, *Oreo* is as much a novel of radical feminism as an artefact of the Black Arts Movement, and anticipates the sexual politics that characterize the depictions of young girls in Morrison, Acker, Alther, and Jong.¹¹⁰ Whilst this does not seem entirely coincident with the rhetoric of 1960s ‘sexual liberation’—particularly as *Oreo*’s sexual empowerment comes predominantly in her ability to *avoid* the advances of others, thereby maintaining control over her body and keeping her virginity intact—her candour does prove characteristic of a general trend amid the Animate Child toward sexual precocity, especially in young girls. Given that most of these texts are, as mentioned, written by men, this sometimes makes for unsettling reading. Most famously, Nabokov’s *Lolita* was released to controversy in the mid-fifties, depicting a girl of twelve who engages in a sexual relationship with the middle-aged Humbert Humbert; often taken as a bridging point between a modernist and postmodernist aesthetics, Nabakov’s novel does bear many of the hallmarks of the early postmodernist child. As Thomas Karshan notes, Nabakov both romanticizes the ‘the freedom and unpredictability of childhood play’, and uses it to catalyse or analogise his own linguistic ‘free play’ more broadly,¹¹¹ including the ‘bawdy linguistic play’ of a novel which contains much juvenile humour as well as rhapsodic descriptions of the child’s beauty.¹¹² Dolores Haze herself is mischievous and precocious, and Humbert’s idealization of her as the ‘nymphet’ Lolita creates ironic contrast with the reality of an unwashed girl with an ‘eerie vulgarity’, who responds to Humbert’s molestation by ‘picking her nose’ and demanding compensatory candy.¹¹³ Whilst her seeming delight in being a ‘Bad, bad girl,...Juvenile delickwent’ alludes to contemporary anxieties about youth being ‘potentially deviant and [...] eager to flout parents and teachers’,¹¹⁴ however, the novel’s presentation of older men exploiting her precocity for sexual pleasure strikes a much less celebratory note, especially by the time ‘Lolita’ is discovered as a pregnant and poverty-stricken late adolescent at the novel’s close.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp.157-8.

¹¹⁰ Ross, *Oreo*, p.54. For studies on feminism and sexual revolution, see Jane Gerhard, *Desiring Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); and Virginia Nicholson, *How Was it For You?* (London: Penguin, 2019).

¹¹¹ Thomas Karshan, *Vladimir Nabokov and the Art of Play* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.152.

¹¹² Eric Naiman, *Nabokov, Perversely* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), p.18.

¹¹³ Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (Penguin Books, 1997), pp.43-4; 163.

¹¹⁴ Denis Jonnes, *Cold War American Literature and the Rise of Youth Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), p.110.

From this standpoint, Oreó's commixture of sexual candour and frustration at lascivious older men reveals both an early feminist intervention into a predominantly male canon, and shows the limitations of a canon which (like a 'largely male-run [New] Left') often betrays those 'sexist attitudes then rife' through a celebration of girlish animacy.¹¹⁵ When young girls are portrayed in artefacts of early postmodernism, such depictions usually share the murky moral colouring of *Lolita*: Tuli Kupferberg's *1001 Ways to Beat the Draft* (1966) suggests 'advocat[ing] sexual freedom for children', and in Ronald Sukenick's short story 'The Death of the Novel' the narrator repeatedly emphasizes the sexual precocity of his 'fifteen-year-old' girlfriend.¹¹⁶ As Joanna Freer has noted, Pynchon's canon contains numerous depictions of coquettish girls aged eleven to sixteen who flirt with older men, most notably Bianca Erdmann and the fake Ilse in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the Vroom girls in *Mason & Dixon*, and Cassidy in *Bleeding Edge*. Whilst such depictions hint toward authors' immersion in some of the iconography of sexual liberation and bodily autonomy, they also prove indicative of a general tendency for early postmodernist authors to represent women (especially young girls) as 'objects of desire whose sex appeal is conveyed via (soft) pornographic imagery catering to the male gaze'.¹¹⁷ This contrasts to younger boys, who are very seldom sexualized in the literature of early postmodernism; moreover, it should be acknowledged depictions of childish sexuality almost always occur between a younger girl and an older man. This thread will be picked up in greater detail in the next chapter, in which authors often treat the gendered expectations of childhood through depictions of sexual molestation and child abuse, and must tread a fine line between preserving the sexual agency of children and lapsing into depictions of 'erotic innocence' or sexually seductive girlhood.¹¹⁸

Such dual depictions of childish animacy and sexuality recur in the 'Dunyazadiad' of John Barth's *Chimera*, which rephrases the frame-tale of *One Thousand and One Nights* as the story of Scheherazade's younger sister Dunyazad. 'Doony' is implied to be eleven or twelve at the start of the short story, but her time spent watching her sister and her husband from 'the foot of [their] bed' gives her a prodigious knowledge of 'the arts of making love and telling stories'. Like Oreó,

¹¹⁵ Joanna Freer, *Thomas Pynchon and the American Counterculture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.137-8.

¹¹⁶ See Tuli Kupferberg, *1001 Ways to Beat the Draft* (New York: Oliver Layton Press, 1966), p.3; Ronald Sukenick, *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories* (New York: Dial Press, 1969), pp.48-49. Concerns about the sexualization of younger girls was a common thread in the counterculture; see Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009), pp.140-4.

¹¹⁷ Freer, *Pynchon and the Counterculture*, p.151.

¹¹⁸ James Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998).

her sexual candour is both made conspicuous amid her teenage virginity, and yet becomes the main method by which she can preserve it; her talents ultimately help her to seduce, bind and possibly kill own her husband by the end of the story, in which Dunyazad is revealed as the ‘teller’ of the frame tale itself.¹¹⁹ Whilst Barth’s canon is, admittedly, populated more by characters in their late teens and early twenties than children (who show a propensity for roguishness in bawdier appetites for alcohol, drugs and sex), younger characters do themselves betray a kind of sexual precociousness: as well as Barth’s version of Dunyazad, the young boy raised by goats in *Giles-Goat Boy* ‘has himself been in play humping does since he could crawl’ and ‘can scarcely feature a beast that may not mate until its thirteenth year’.¹²⁰ Such depictions do key into the sexual energies of the day, but also render this sexual energy within a more inarticulate joy and creativity—sex and storytelling are apparently two sides of the same coin—which manifests in childhood. At the start of *The Sot-Weed Factor*, for instance, the young hero Ebenezer Cooke is both an ‘avid reader’ and fond of ‘play-acting’:

Indoors or not, hour after hour, they played at pirates, soldiers, clerics, Indians, royalty, giants, martyrs, lords and ladies, or any other creatures that took their fancy, inventing action and dialogue as they played. Ebenezer, especially, became ingenious at disguising his assumed identity in the presence of adults, whilst still revealing it clearly enough to Anna, to her great delight, by some apparently innocent gesture or remark.¹²¹

Like the young children of Brautigan, Fariña and Pynchon, Ebenezer and Anna’s imaginative energy both gives them an ‘unpenetrated sense of community’ and creates a ‘discrete world’ apart from the prying eyes of adults. Their childish enthusiasm also foreshadows Barth’s narrative (in which Ebenezer does indeed find himself amid pirates, Indians and royalty) as well the comic irreverence of Ebenezer’s eventual masterwork, *The Marylandiad*.

Admittedly, children appear less than may be expected in Barth’s early canon, and his engagement with the childish usually takes the form of a wistful look back toward the childhood of his own protagonists. Here, creativity becomes less of a general condition of youth than a sign of great things to come; like *Oreo*, Barth’s novels often ironically invoke a Greek mythic structure in which their heroes’ later exceptionality is rooted in an unusual birth or childhood. For Billy/George in *Giles-Goat Boy*, this is implicit in both his youth as a true ‘kid’, and in his unusual

¹¹⁹ John Barth, *Chimera* (Victoria, TX: Dalkey Archive Press, 2015), pp.6-8, 23.

¹²⁰ John Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1987), p.11.

¹²¹ John Barth, *The Sot-Weed Factor* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1970), p.16.

status as offspring of the supercomputer WESCAC; for Ambrose in *Lost in The Funhouse* this is presaged in his infancy when a swarm of bees are drawn to his birthmark. Typically for Barth, their heroism is ultimately realised in the act of writing, and a reflexive self-writing at that. George Giles is the author of the Revised New Syllabus, a kind of ‘souped up Bible’ that forms the basis of his own mythology and the ‘found text’ of Barth’s novel. Ambrose, meanwhile, voices the artistic ambitions at the heart of *Lost in the Funhouse*, and much of the collection is implied to be of the young boy’s invention. Whilst this differs from the intrusive influence seen in much postmodernism then, children and child’s play are still provided as an irreverent analogy of the artistic process, and much of *Lost in the Funhouse* proves an effective distillation of the creative potential of the ‘childish’ upon early postmodernism in general. It is no coincidence that the collection was published just after Barth’s influential essay ‘The Literature of Exhaustion’, one of the clearest articulations of the nascent literary style that would eventually wear the label ‘postmodernist’; here Barth called for intertextual works that ‘imitate the form of the Novel’, so self-reflexive they ‘border on [their] own caricature’, metaleptic to the point of the ‘*regressus in infinitum*’.¹²² *Lost in the Funhouse* certainly shows fidelity to these aims, beginning with a Möbius strip that repeats ‘Once upon a time there was a story that began’ endlessly, featuring one story that ‘tells itself’, and telling the story of Menelaus through seven layers of ‘narration-within-narration’. The opening ‘frame-tale’ in particular displays much potential to read this view of postmodernism in proximity to the ‘childish’; the use of instructions to assemble the Möbius strip via scissors and glue resembles the ‘interactive’ nature of much children’s literature, and the use of ‘Once Upon a Time’ flaunts the text’s artifice via the form of the fairy tale.¹²³ Along with the use of the child protagonist Ambrose, this use of ‘childish’ forms alerts us to the text’s irreverent shirking of the conventions of literary realism, and shows the extent to which a child’s view of the world might reinvigorate (or re-animate) a canon of dull and ‘exhausted fictions’.

Particularly as Ambrose has often been read as a light pastiche of Stephen Dedalus, ‘Lost in the Funhouse’ might prove a particularly useful way to distinguish modernist experimentation from early postmodernist experimentation. Whereas as Joyce’s hero went forth to ‘encounter [...] the reality of experience’, Ambrose wants to create in his writing a ‘truly astonishing funhouse, incredibly complex yet utterly controlled’, invested with ‘a cunning of [...] multifarious

¹²² John Barth, ‘The Literature of Exhaustion’, *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp.62-76 (pp.72-74).

¹²³ Barth, ‘Frame Tale’, *Lost in the Funhouse* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), pp.1-2. See also Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, *Interactive Books: Playful Media Before Pop-Ups* (New York; Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

vastness'.¹²⁴ True, the 'funhouse' often provokes 'fear and confusion' in the nervous Ambrose, and the use of a carnival as a 'garish simulacrum of the underworld' (in the words of Judith Fletcher) foretells some of the darker ends toward which 'childish' and 'adult' concerns will be apposed in later postmodernist literature. Even so, the image of a young boy in a funhouse is a worthy metaphor for the stylistics of early postmodernist writers. For one, it is perhaps not emphasized enough in the scholarship of writers like Pynchon, Reed, Fariña, Brautigan, Barth and Ross that, for all the 'incredible complexity' of their works, their works are centrally very joyful. Amid their central commitment to slapstick, jokes, irreverence and comic wordplay it is little wonder that the figure of a mischievous or creative-minded child seems a favoured trope. Moreover, it seems natural that works exhibiting a combination of ambitious experimentalism and suspicion of canonized art show sympathy toward the humble imagination of the child akin to the Romantics, and many early postmodernists specifically associate the creative energy of the child with the act of wordplay or writing. In a characteristic self-reflexive twist, this is often associated specifically with the literary text of which they form part—the young narrator of *Trout Fishing in America* is himself a writer of "Trout Fishing in America"—which implies an important kinship between the imaginative 'play' of children and the aesthetics of postmodernist literature. Centrally, this 'play' abandons any attempt at a mimetic recreation of the 'real world' or an attempt to understand 'the reality of experience' (as in Joyce's protagonist), but instead delights in the construction of new worlds, consonant with Brian McHale's account of postmodernism as 'ontological' rather than 'epistemological'. The use of a childish 'play' to undermine faith in a singular 'real' world or collection of 'true' values (i.e. to move from 'epistemological' to 'ontological') is one of the most influential legacies of this early phase of postmodernism, and one which outlasts the political fervour which catalysed many of these countercultural writers in the first place.¹²⁵

Childishness and Postmodernist 'Play': Comics, Fairy Tales and Nonsense

Given the importance of children as figures of creative energy, it is perhaps unsurprising to find a large stock of source material for early postmodernist writers in children's literature and

¹²⁴ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 2000), p.275; John Barth, 'Lost in the Funhouse', *Lost in the Funhouse*, pp.72-97 (p.97).

¹²⁵ Judith Fletcher, *Myths of the Underworld in Contemporary Culture: The Backward Gaze* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p.60.

culture. Emphasising the similarity of their texts to art enjoyed or produced by children, writers can simultaneously ‘satirically denounce [...] pretentious content’, distance themselves from the social hierarchies embedded in ‘high art’, and evoke more humble and naïve imaginative aims in their work.¹²⁶ Often this is implicit in early postmodernists’ constant use of farce and low humour, by which they accentuate their puerility in the face of ‘serious’ art. Fran Ross’s *Oreo*, for instance, opens with an epigraph attributed to Wittgenstein reading ‘Burp!’, and authors like Ishmael Reed, Steve Katz, Ronald Sukenick and Thomas Pynchon show a penchant for punning, alliterative or ‘just plain silly’ character names (from ‘Bukka Doopeyduck’ to ‘Dr Hilarius’).¹²⁷ Much work has been done on postmodernism’s comic antecedents in this vein, including Menippean satire, Restoration Comedy and the picaresque novel, and the comic logic of early postmodernism has been variously characterized within broader traditions like Bakhtin’s ‘carnavalesque’, or Nietzsche’s notion of a ‘Dionysian mode’. Less scholarship, however, has emphasized the role played by children’s literature or child’s ‘play’ in general, which are frequently collapsed in postmodernist literature into a broad but integrated quality of what Peer E. Sørensen has called the ‘childish style’. This is not necessarily the same as ‘the mimetic childlike tone’ Hans-Heino Ewers talks of, although early postmodernist texts do sometimes try to replicate the quality of children’s speech.¹²⁸ It is perhaps closer to Peter Hollindale’s famous concept of ‘childness’, a broad coinage which aimed to defuse the negative connotations of the word ‘childish’, and to designate both ‘the distinguishing property of a text in children’s literature’ and ‘the property that the child brings to the reading of a text’.¹²⁹ Even so, I propose that the word ‘childish’ is perhaps the most suitable in this circumstance, given that early postmodernists do revel in the extent to which ‘childish’ can be used derogatively, and because Sørensen’s concept of the ‘childish style’ seems more easily transferrable to postmodernism. Though approximating the naivete of the child, this hides a complex ‘narrative stance’ that aims to ‘alienate the narrative world’, resulting in a textual space in which ‘construction, play, and artificiality are foregrounded’.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Manfred Pütz, ‘The Art of the Acronym in Thomas Pynchon’, *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (1991), pp.371-82 (p.376).

¹²⁷ T.P. Caesar, ‘A Note on Pynchon’s Naming’, *Pynchon Notes*, Vol. 5 (1981), pp.5-10 (p.7).

¹²⁸ Hans-Heino Ewers, *Fundamental Concepts of Children’s Literature Research*, trans. William J. McCann (New York & London: Routledge, 2009), pp.151-2.

¹²⁹ Peter Hollindale, *Signs of Childness in Children’s Books* (Stroud: Thimble, 1997), p.47.

¹³⁰ See Helene Høyrup, ‘The Origins of Modernism in Fairy-Tale: Hans Christian Andersen’s Authorship and Canon Studies’, in Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and Anja Müller (eds.), *Canon Constitution and Canon Change in Children’s Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), pp.105-118 (p.111).

Without probing too deeply into the aesthetic logic of postmodernism—which I have already treated in my introduction—there are obvious points of intersection with the stylistic features of authors treated in this chapter. The prominence of ‘construction’ and ‘artificiality’ seem consonant with postmodernist narratives’ constant ‘awareness of the constructedness or fictionality of what [they] purport to describe’, and the subsequent flaunting of what Marjorie Perloff termed a ‘radical artifice’ with regard to postmodernist poetic forms.¹³¹ As for the element of ‘play’, the word has become commonplace in relation to postmodernism due to Derrida’s reliance on the term in the essay ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’, which has often been evoked to contextualise a postmodernist ‘play [of signifiers], permitted by the lack or absence of a centre or origin’.¹³² Derrida’s usage is notoriously slippery, particularly since ‘jeu’ can mean both ‘play’ and ‘game’ in French, and its use as the theoretical basis for much writing on postmodernism comes at the cost of some critical specificity. That being said, Ruth Burke, Brian Edwards and Steven D. Scott have utilised the term ‘play’ to explicitly explore the ludic dimensions of postmodernist literature.¹³³ Their focus on the child is only ever implicit, but they do provide some useful ways to think about postmodernism in proximity to the child; Burke notes the ‘centrality of the child to all discussions of play’, before contextualizing postmodernist literature within a tradition that touches upon Friedrich Schiller’s concept of the ‘play drive’ and Freud’s view of writing as a legacy of childhood ‘daydreaming’.¹³⁴ Both Burke and Scott also foreground the definitions of ‘play’ given in Johan Huizinga’s famous 1938 study *Homo Ludens*, which bear an obvious relation both to the Animate Child and to postmodernism in general:

The first main characteristic of play [is] that is free, is in fact freedom. A second characteristic is [...] that play is not “ordinary” or “real” life. It is rather a stepping out of “real” life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own. Every child knows perfectly well that he is “only pretending”, or that it was “only for fun”. [...] Play is distinct from “ordinary” life both as to locality and duration.¹³⁵

¹³¹ See Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1998), p.118; Marjorie Perloff, *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991)

¹³² Jacques Derrida, ‘Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences’, in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp.351-370 (p.365).

¹³³ See Steven D. Scott, *The Gamefulness of American Postmodernism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000) and Ruth Burke, *The Games of Poetics: Ludic Criticism and Postmodern Fiction* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

¹³⁴ Burke, *The Games of Poetics*, p.7.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

The definition of play (particularly child's play) as a 'free' and self-aware 'stepping out of "real life"' resonates with Best and Kellner's concept of postmodernist literature's autotelic and 'radical[ly] anti-realist' style, as well as the Animate Child's own love of 'freedom' and disdain for 'real life'.¹³⁶ Though Huizinga's subsequent characteristics of 'play' do seem less relevant—his emphasis on play's capacity to make 'order' seems inimical to Lodge's notion of postmodernism 'randomness'—Scott and Burke have done much here to differentiate 'free play' from a rule-based 'game'.¹³⁷ Scott is right that a postmodernist writer like Barth is perhaps better characterized by the term 'gameful' than 'playful' in his meticulous construction of narrative.¹³⁸ There is little 'freedom' in his carefully plotted layers of metalepsis in 'Menelaiaid' and 'Dunyazadiad', and his ultimate model for a 'new' literature (even one based on a child's imagination) is a funhouse that remains 'utterly controlled' by a central 'operator'.¹³⁹

Focusing on 'play' rather than 'game', then, comparing postmodernist play to theories of child's play yields some interesting points of intersection. Consistent with the Romantic roots of writers, and McHale's notion of an 'ontological mode', postmodernist writers tend toward a view of child's play as fundamentally autotelic, an escape into make-believe where one 'can suspend the normal rules of how the world works to create worlds of their own'.¹⁴⁰ In anthropological and psychological terms, such a view of children's play would have seemed naïve even fifty years ago, and most play theorists in the present day place heavy emphasis on the assimilation of reality into play, and the developmental benefits of even imaginative play. By contrast, most postmodernist texts show ambivalence and even disdain for the idea of a children's culture or literature organized with child development and socialization in mind.¹⁴¹ Instead, they find inspiration in forms of children's literature that seem to act as an aid to, or continuation of, the child's imagination, including fairy tales and fantasy, picture books, nursery rhymes, nonsense poems, 'early readers', and comic books.¹⁴² Though this does betray a naïve understanding of

¹³⁶ See Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York and London: The Guildford Press, 1997), pp.130-2.

¹³⁷ See David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy and the Typology of Modern Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp.220-45.

¹³⁸ Steven D Scott, *The Gamefulness of American Postmodernism*, pp.64-5.

¹³⁹ Barth, 'Lost in the Funhouse', p.97.

¹⁴⁰ Wendy Russell, Stuart Lester and Hilary Smith, 'Perspectives on Play Research', in Wendy Russell, Stuart Lester and Hilary Smith (eds.), *Practice-based Research in Children's Play* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2018), pp.1-15 (p.8). On the view of child's play as autotelic, see Muchacka Bozena, 'Exploratory Play and Cognitive Activity', in Tom Jambor and Jan van Gils (eds.), *Several Perspectives on Children's Play*, (Antwerp: Garant, 2007), pp.79-104.

¹⁴¹ This will come to the fore in the following chapter.

¹⁴² For studies on children's literature and imaginative play, see Dorothy G. Singer and Jerome L. Singer, *The House of Make-Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009) and Kelley, Joyce, 'Caution—Children

children's culture as 'child-centric' (these books are still, after all, created and curated by adults), these authors do lean on forms that seem to privilege the perspective of the child, featuring less focus on psychologically 'round' characters than easy-to-spot 'goodies' and 'baddies'; less focus on complex plotting than humorous wordplay; a wealth of buccaneering adventures; colourful illustrations; and depictions of under-supervised children allowed to make their own decisions. Tellingly, many children's books written in this vein—from eighteenth-century chapbooks to *The Cat in the Hat*—were controversial in their own right, viewed as dangerous for their eschewing of moral instruction in favour of light amusement.¹⁴³ By the fervour of the 1960s, and with an injection of black humour that made them emphatically unsuitable for children, these texts provided a useful store of influence for an irreverent return to youth.

In these early years of postmodernism, the influence of children's literature was often as simple as the adoption of a formal style. As Brian McHale notes, illustrations to novels had been demoted by the mid-century to 'popular magazine fiction and children's literature', but made a reappearance in modernist forms of 'collage' novels, especially those connected with Dada or Surrealism.¹⁴⁴ In continuation, anarchic Yippie works by Jerry Rubin, Tuli Kupferberg and Abbie Hoffman often make use of cartoonish illustrations and photomontage alongside snatches of text and poetry. Tuli Kupferberg's publications are especially open in the illustrations' connotation of 'childishness', with works like *Selected Fruits and Nuts* (1959), *The Christine Keeler Colouring Book* (1963), and *Listen to the Mockingbird: Satiric Songs to Tunes You Know* (1973) combining juvenile formats and rudimentary drawings alongside lewd humour and asinine political commentary. Other countercultural publications made heavy use of cartoons in the form of the comic-strip; 'Fantastic Freak Fables' in *Steal This Book* and 'Class War Comix' in Jerry Rubin's *We Are Everywhere* in particular use a comic-book format (with consecutive panels and speech bubbles) to shed light on police brutality and governmental corruption.¹⁴⁵ This format converged with the style of the 'underground comix' published in magazines like *Zap Comix* and *The East Village Other*, which injected the comic book with the influence of sex, drugs and social dissent. Artists like Robert Crumb were thereby able to openly flout the censorship that had

at Play', in Joyce E. Kettel (ed.) *Children's Play in Literature: Investigating the Strengths and the Subversions of the Playing Child* (New York & London: Routledge, 2019), pp.1-23.

¹⁴³ See Andrew O'Malley, *The Making of the Modern Child: Children's Literature and Childhood in the Late Eighteenth Century* (New York; London: Routledge, 2003), pp.17-18.

¹⁴⁴ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London & New York: Routledge, 1987), p.189.

¹⁴⁵ Hoffman, *Steal This Book*, pp.249-50; Jerry Rubin, *We Are Everywhere* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp.256-7.

threatened major publishers since the 1954 Comics Code, and partook in a widespread ‘adultification’ of the ‘quintessentially juvenile’ format over the long Sixties.¹⁴⁶ The influence of comic-book lore on experimental literature was thus essentially reciprocated, as Ronald Sukenick prophesied in ‘The Death of the Novel’: just as ‘comic books imitated fiction’, soon ‘we’re going to have fiction like comic books’.¹⁴⁷

The use of comic-book conventions in Yippie publications parallels a tendency in some early postmodernist texts toward formal heterogeneity and inventive presentational styles. Again, these were undoubtedly influenced by elements of the modernist avant-garde (particularly Dada and early Surrealism), and indeed held a close relationship to the kind of ‘concrete poetry’ found in Beat literature and the New York School. Such presentational choices are seen in the sparing use of punctuation in Burroughs’ and Reed’s early works, or the appearance of interspersed pictures and interpolated ‘texts’ in variant fonts, which can be found in Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*, Don Barthelme’s *Snow White*, and in Pynchon’s first three novels. Again, other choices draw attention to their juvenility; Ronald Sukenick’s *Up* (1968) features a section near the end of the novel in which a sentence ‘falls off’ of the page as if on a slide, and Fran Ross’s *Oreo* interpolates a young boy’s homework assignment in the middle of the novel.¹⁴⁸ Others have antecedents in what Jacqueline Reid-Walsh has called the ‘interactive’ tradition of children’s books, in which young readers are encouraged to actively ‘play’ with the story.¹⁴⁹ Both Steve Katz’s novel *The Exaggerations of Peter Prince* (1968) and Robert Coover’s short story ‘The Babysitter’ (1969) feature diverging narrative paths so the reader can ‘choose’ the outcome of the story, and Gass’s *Willie Master’s Lonesome Wife* (1968) features a miscellany of different fonts and typefaces, including ‘mirrored’ passages and blocks of words forming shapes and pictures. Even Burroughs’ user-friendly instructions for ‘The Cut-Up Method’ and the ‘Frame Tale’ of John Barth’s *Lost in the Funhouse*, which instructs a reader how to cut out and assemble a Möbius strip, seem examples of these ‘hybrid print objects’, ‘a combination of [...] book, visual print, paper toy, and game’.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ See Roger Sabin, *Adult Comics* (New York; London: Routledge, 2013), p.146. The history of comic-books will be treated in more detail in my fourth chapter.

¹⁴⁷ Sukenick, *Death of the Novel and Other Stories*, p.46.

¹⁴⁸ Ronald Sukenick, *Up* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968), p.317; Fran Ross, *Oreo*, pp.134-5.

¹⁴⁹ See Reid-Walsh, *Interactive Books*.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.23.

Like the Yippies' comics and picturebooks, the childish elements of such narrative forms are very much offset by the decidedly 'adult' content of the stories themselves. The ostentatious style of *Willie Master's Lonesome Wife* is not driven toward maintaining the interest of an early reader but toward seducing a sexually diffident reader-husband, and the accompanying illustrations of the novella border on the pornographic. 'The Babysitter' features a young teenage girl struggling to control two disorderly children and a baby, and most of the various diverging narratives of the story end up with the babysitter being sexually abused by her boyfriend, his friend, the children's father, or some combination of all three. At the end of the story two vastly divergent outcomes are given: either Mr and Mrs Tucker return home to find their children in bed and the dishes done, or Mrs Tucker returns to find her 'children [...] murdered, [her] husband gone, a corpse in [her] bathtub' and her 'house [...] wrecked'.¹⁵¹ The disorderly narrative thus remains essentially unsettled in the same way as the rambunctious Tucker children, albeit without necessarily celebrating their animate behaviour in the same way as authors like Pynchon or Reed. Coover's 'animacy' of style tends more toward Barth's complexity than Reed's heterogeneity, making reader interaction a challenge as much as an invitation— 'The Babysitter' is simply a remarkably difficult text to follow. The same could be said of 'The Exaggerations of Peter Prince', which, though boasting on its dust-jacket to contain 'an adventure for the reader and for the hero', and a 'merry search for [...] old myths and new legends', contains at times three parallel narratives on each page, constant interjections from a 'Steve Katz' about his views on the action, and a series of pages crudely crossed out.¹⁵² This lively and flippant style again contrasts with the difficulty of its reading experience, as well as the general bleakness of the narrative. Many of the protagonist's 'adventures' consist of darkly comic vignettes of his unhappy domestic life, and though Prince claims that he 'liked [...] children, more than anything', most of the children that appear in the narrative are spurned, maimed or killed.¹⁵³

Such black humour defines most other early postmodernist stories with antecedents in children's literature and culture, which make use of narrative tropes and characters if not 'interactive' presentational forms. Amongst the 'Mythologies' in Steve Katz 1970 collection *Creamy and Delicious* we see a multiplicity of characters lifted from 1930s comic books, including

¹⁵¹ Robert Coover, 'The Babysitter', in *Pricksongs and Descants* (New York & Scarborough: Plume Books, 1969), pp.206-230 (p.239).

¹⁵² Steve Katz, *The Exaggerations of Peter Prince* (New York; Chicago; San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), pp.42-60, 117-151.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.137. See also the story of 'Peter Prince and his friend Stoop', pp.215-35.

Nancy and Sluggo, Mandrake the Magician, Wonder Woman and Plastic Man.¹⁵⁴ Most of them are drawn bathetically far from their adventurous roots: Wonder Woman fails to stop the Vietnam War, and Plastic Man is portrayed as a prospector who claims land by covering it in plastic wrap. Allusions to comic book characters also appear in Pynchon, Reed and Don Barthelme, similarly displaced from their heroic adventures into either the mundane rhythms of quotidian life, or else bleak visions of humiliation and defeat. Barthelme's 1968 story 'The Joker's Greatest Triumph' takes influence both from the DC comic run and the camp television show to air in the mid-sixties, but its costumed heroes, abrupt twists of plot and constant exclamations ('Great Scott!') are accompanied by an inexplicable young character called 'Frederic', a friend of Batman's who makes a living selling *Grit*.¹⁵⁵ Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), meanwhile, features a section near the end of the novel which lapses into a pastiche of a Skippy cartoon and then a superhero comic book called the 'Floundering Four', based on Marvel Comics' popular *Fantastic Four* series.¹⁵⁶ The narrator admits, however, that it is 'hard to feel much confidence in these idiots', who drive a Batmobile with a 'plastic baby's steering wheel' and are served by 'thousands of kids [...], skullcaps on their heads with plastic propellers' on top.¹⁵⁷ Whilst the use of such tropes irreverently undercut their expected heroism, they also betray Pynchon's simple delight in tokens of children's culture; as well as comics, he has a penchant for incorporating kazoos, yoyos, cartoons and Shirley Temple films into his narratives. Doubtless an example of the broader clashes between high and low that Fiedler emphasized (and that have become a staple of the Pynchonian), the infusion of the childish into the adult also yields an ironic collision between the specious and the serious: in *V.*, Benny Profane reflects upon the vagaries of 'Fortune's yoyo', and in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa communicates with Maxwell's demon whilst watching 'two Yogi Bears, one Magilla Gorilla and a Peter Potamus' episode on the television.¹⁵⁸ Whilst acknowledging that, by the mid-Sixties, cartoons and superheroes loomed as large in the American 'mythology' as Classical or Biblical figures, the irruption of a simple 'childishness' into the realm of more complex philosophical and scientific discourse releases the texts from becoming overly portentous or didactic. Indeed, since so many examples seem to undercut the happy-go-lucky naiveté of the child as much as the grave solemnity of the 'adult', they do not function as repudiations of either, and remain characteristically ambiguous.

¹⁵⁴ See Steve Katz, *Creamy and Delicious: Eat My Words (In Other Words)* (New York: Random House, 1970).

¹⁵⁵ See Donald Barthelme, 'The Joker's Greatest Triumph', in *Come Back, Dr Caligari* (New York: Anchor Books, 1965), pp.113-20.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.762-4, 798-807.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.799-801.

¹⁵⁸ Pynchon, *V.*, p.367; *Crying of Lot 49*, p.73.

More ambivalent and ironic uses of children's culture will come to the fore in depictions of the Preterite Child in the next chapter. Alongside failed superheroes, bleak fairy-tale inversions are often used to this end, since the centrality of child characters to the form yields fruitful sources for children in peril or pain. Critics like Cristina Bacchilega and Kevin Paul Smith have written extensively about such 'folkloric intertexts', and whilst these 'postmodern fairy tales' often tend toward gallows humour, the use of a fantastical, 'Once Upon A Time' register can also be used in the service of flaunting a conscious narrative artifice or love of 'story for story's sake'.¹⁵⁹ These are the 'made-of-wood thumps of myths and tales' W.C. Bamberger associates with Steve Katz, or what Steven D. Scott calls Barth's quality of 'marvelousness'.¹⁶⁰ In both, the emphasis upon the construction rather than the content of stories both emphasizes the artifice inherent in any narrative, and repudiates the mimetic aims of 'serious writing' for a celebration of creativity and inventiveness. Again, this often works by a collision of the 'childish' and 'adult'; like Barth's overtly sexualized Dunyazad, both Don Barthelme's novel *Snow White* (1967) and Coover's collection *Pricksongs and Descants* (1969) infuses fairy-tale conventions with sexual lasciviousness and bawdy humour. Each does often tend toward bleak irony—Coover's Beast never turned into a prince, Jack grew up to become the Giant he slew, and Snow White is reimagined as a depressed twenty-something whose seven dwarves are sex-crazed housemates. The contrast between the 'magical' origins of their tales and the tales' deflated afterlife does represent a desire to pastiche 'exhausted' source material, but also seems to try to recapture the 'simple consolations [such forms] offer to children'.¹⁶¹ Thus we see Coover's Hansel and Gretel, and Red Riding Hood, hesitate upon the threshold of maturity at the end of 'The Door' and 'The Gingerbread House'. The doors through which they must enter offer their own pleasures—some carnal, clearly, as the 'heart-shaped' door that 'puls[es] softly'—but at the cost of the simpler joys of 'nursery songs about May baskets and gingerbread houses'.¹⁶² Similarly, Snow White longs for an 'irruption of the magical into her life', since her 'magic singing bone' has now become disavowed by 'the instrumentarium of the physical sciences', and even her enchanted hair now only provokes a lukewarm response.¹⁶³ Suitably, her response is to try and immerse herself again

¹⁵⁹ Scott, *Gamefulness of American Postmodernism*, p.64. See also Cristina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); and Kevin Paul Smith, *The Postmodern Fairytale: Folkloric Intertexts in Contemporary Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

¹⁶⁰ W.C. Bamberger, *43 Views of Steve Katz* (Cabin John, MD: Wildside Press, 2007), p.60; Scott, *The Gamefulness of American Postmodernism*, p.63.

¹⁶¹ Brian Evenson, *Understanding Robert Coover* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), p.55.

¹⁶² Robert Coover, 'The Gingerbread House', in *Pricksongs and Descants* (New York: Dutton, 1969), pp.61-75 (pp.62, 75).

¹⁶³ Don Barthelme, *Snow White* (New York: Scribner, 1996), pp.76, 95-107.

in the childishness of the original tale; in one of her last soliloquizing passages, she opines that she doesn't 'trust anyone over twelve', and should 'go out and speak to some eleven-year-olds, now, to refresh [herself]'.¹⁶⁴

Though this 'childishness' might seem to undermine itself, then, its interaction with more serious or unhappy concerns remains a two-way exchange. In one sense, these texts' use of the conventions of children's literature amid philosophical and social concerns makes abundantly clear that the tumultuous world of late 1960s America is not always a place of enchantment or heroism, and yet its exchange of adult solemnity and childish naiveté seems to rejuvenate the former even as it undercuts the latter. This dialectic comes to the fore in Robert Coover's *The Cat in the Hat for President* (1968), ostensibly a political satire about the similarities between campaign slogans and the rhyming dialogue of Dr Seuss's character.¹⁶⁵ The novella mostly consists of narrating the Cat's cartoonish campaign stunts, such as 'plummeting out of an airplane, umbrella for a parachute' and '[falling] off of Pike's Peak, doing a handstand on a cane and a vane', and does thereby register disdain for fickle politicians, and the short attention span of student protestors drawn to 'goofy anarchist[s]' like the Cat.¹⁶⁶ Even so, the Cat's Yippie-esque 'revolution' is ultimately framed not just as a regression into childhood but a welcome relief from the dull and formulaic politics of the day:

We have a terrible need for the extraordinary. We are weary of war, weary of the misery under our supposed prosperity, weary of dullness and routine, weary of all the old ideas, weary of all the masks we wear, the roles we play, the foolish games we sustain. The Cat cuts through all this. We laugh. For a minute, we are free.¹⁶⁷

Recalling proclamations in Pynchon and Reed about the importance of laughter, the linguistic play of the Cat betrays a devotion to the 'extraordinary' even as it undercuts its viability as political rhetoric. By the end of the novella, the satirical logic of the novel completely turns in on itself, and the supporters of the Cat become less objects of scorn than his detractors; the Cat is finally captured, butchered, burned and eaten by a hostile crowd, who then engage in a 'pretty marvelous orgy'.¹⁶⁸ As a 'political fable' this moment of sadistic humour makes the story fairly

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p.151.

¹⁶⁵ See the author's introduction in Robert Coover, *The Cat in the Hat for President: A Political Fable* (London: Foxrock/OR, 2018), p.vi.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp.vi, 39. Coover implies the similarities between his own 'goofy anarchist' and those adored by students and Yippie activists.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p.24.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p.64.

abstruse, but implies a broad censure of what one character calls ‘the madness of normalcy’ in American politics.¹⁶⁹ For Coover, perhaps the truly ‘mad’ candidate is a President who promised ‘vast federal programs’ to one city and ‘championed states’ rights’ in other, who ‘was a Mason, kept dogs, went to baseball games [...] and played golf’ when he ‘didn’t especially *like* to play golf’.¹⁷⁰ The Cat’s heady antics, on the other hand, enact an ‘affirmation that salvation is still possible through [a] daemonic sense of play’, as Jackson I. Cope argues; the Cat briefly re-‘animates’ a society that ‘continue[s] to exist by virtue of dead forms’, living ‘cut off from all life’.¹⁷¹

Notably, the Cat’s subversion of entrenched political conventions often operates on the level of wordplay. Not only does its silly rhymes make for a humorous parody of campaign sloganeering, but its speeches toy with political cliché: in one such example, the Cat extends its promise of a ‘government of the people’ to a government ‘down the people, between the people, across the people, past the people’ and ‘so on to “government up the people”’.¹⁷² The Cat, then, is a writer who aims to ‘jars us’ out of ‘unexamined acceptance of generic rules’, just as Kathryn Hume has noted of Coover—the author and his character are both taking on the same project of defamiliarization.¹⁷³ Shklovsky’s famous term not only reminds us of the very obvious continuities between early postmodernism and the earlier twentieth-century avant-garde, but the usefulness of a childish perspective to the world from a perspective that ‘has not had time to become jaded by the process of habitualization’, as Debbie Pinfold has written of the use of the child in German literature.¹⁷⁴ On the level of language, this defamiliarization can work by adopting a register befitting children’s literature, but also by attempting to recreate or approximate a child’s language. Many early postmodernist works do indeed make use of improvisatory words and grammatically faulty syntax; even Burroughs’ cut-up can be seen as an attempt to essentially undo language acquisition, since our thoughts have been ‘scripted’ since

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p.40.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p.41.

¹⁷¹ Jackson I. Cope, *Robert Coover’s Fictions* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), p.53; Coover, *The Cat in the Hat for President*, p.38. Even the Cat’s own grisly martyrdom is ultimately regenerative, catalysing his progressive party’s victory under the slogan ‘The New View’, and the Cat’s Hat is left conspicuously waiting at the end of the story, ready to spring ‘twenty-six other Cats [...] on an unsuspecting world’. See Coover, *The Cat in the Hat for President*, p.69.

¹⁷² Ibid., p.40.

¹⁷³ Kathryn Hume, ‘Robert Coover: The Metaphysics of Bondage’, *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 98, No. 4 (Oct., 2003), pp.827-41 (p.838).

¹⁷⁴ Debbie Pinfold, *The Child’s View of the Third Reich in German Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.4. The legacy of the Romantics is again clear here: using the ‘child’s sense of wonder and novelty’ to renew ‘the appearances which every day [...] had rendered familiar’ is ‘the privilege of genius’, according to Samuel Taylor Coleridge. See Coleridge’s *The Friend: A Series of Essays* (London: Gale & Curtis, 1812), p.76.

infancy. The work of Ishmael Reed and Don Barthelme, meanwhile, shows a debt to forms of writing associated with the ‘nonsense’ tradition of children’s literature. Amongst the many different slang, dialect and scat terms in Ishmael Reed’s *Free-Lance Pall Bearers* he integrates a reference to ‘jabberwocky conspirators’, taken from Lewis Carroll’s famous nonsense poem, and Don Barthelme’s short story ‘The Death of Edward Lear’ (1971) depicts the famous ‘Nonsense Writer and Landscape Painter’ sending out invitations ‘well in advance’ to his own funeral.¹⁷⁵ Barthelme’s debt to nonsense literature has been raised by Fred Miller Robinson and Philip Nel, who classes Barthelme in the ‘second generation of American surrealists’ (with Dr Seuss amongst the first), whilst noting the clear debts forms of surrealist writing bore to Carroll and Lear.¹⁷⁶ Similar to their use of a ‘spirit of playfulness to rearrange the familiar world’, Barthelme’s texts reveal the constructed-ness of the world through language by what Lance Olsen has called ‘linguistic pratfalls’, combining words from different registers and discourses into a shifting and self-deprecating ‘slapstick of language’.¹⁷⁷

This linguistic play comes to the fore in Barthelme’s second novel *The Dead Father*, released in 1975. The premise is indeed distinctly Learian: a huge father, ‘Overall length, 3200 cubits’, is dragged by cables across the countryside to be buried in a large excavation ‘many kilometres’ away.¹⁷⁸ In the sense that the novel is essentially putting the ‘Father’ to rest, Barthelme does both acknowledge the generation gap (most of the group travelling with the Father are young adults) and undermine parental authority in a similar way to the rebellious iterations of the Animate Child in Burroughs and Reed. In addition, much of the trials that the group face upon their quest bear a distinct mark of juvenility; they meet a child couple who wish to ‘escape’ school, throw a party with a group of apes, and find a town with no streets where children ‘play on roofs’ instead.¹⁷⁹ Much of the novel’s animacy, however, comes in what

¹⁷⁵ Reed, *The Free-Lance Pall Bearers*, p.37; see also Barthelme’s ‘The Death of Edward Lear’, in *Donald Barthelme: Sixty Stories* (St Ives: Penguin, 2003), pp.359-62 (p.359).

¹⁷⁶ See Fred Miller Robinson, ‘Nonsense and Sadness in Donald Barthelme and Edward Lear’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 80 (1981), pp.164-76; and Philip Nel, *The Avant-Garde and American Postmodernity* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), pp.73-4.

¹⁷⁷ Lance Olsen, ‘Linguistic Pratfalls in Barthelme’, *South Atlantic Review*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (November 1986), pp.69-77.

¹⁷⁸ Donald Barthelme, *The Dead Father* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), pp.3-4, 168.

¹⁷⁹ Barthelme, *The Dead Father*, pp.16, 100, 105.

Jermone Klinkowitz calls ‘reinvesting an otherwise dead language with a new reality’, a process that often makes use of a child’s words:¹⁸⁰

The Father’s Day to end all. And I understand but list, list, let’s go back. To the bedwetting. To the dampdream. And I a oneohsevenyearold boy, just like the rest of them. Pitterpatter. I reierate&reiterate&reiterate&reiterate, pitter-patter. Remember some old Papsday when heaped all round with gifties, the delegations presenting themselves, the musicking, quantuscumque, I’m a jollygood jollygood, pip of a pap, loved and rererespected by all.¹⁸¹

Appearing just before the Dead Father is finally interred at the end of the novel, the above example uses the character’s regression into childhood to catalyse its heady play of language. Partly a mimicry of infant speech, this section alone incorporates onomatopoeia (‘pitterpatter’), alliterative kennings (‘dampdream’), archaisms (‘musicking’), Latinisms (‘quantuscumque’), parodies of British upper-class dialect (‘jollygood jollygood’), and a kind of stuttering (‘rererespected’). The use of a child’s perspective makes this language ‘new’, recalling the children at the start of the novel who were ‘invigorated with the sweet sensuality of language’, and took delight in listing all of the adjectives they had just learned.¹⁸² They provide a means to escape the stifling conformity associated with fatherhood; the interpolated ‘A Manual for Sons’ presents fathers as primarily reprimanding and intimidating, teaching their children ‘what is not true’ whilst ‘in a cloud of unknowing’.¹⁸³ The distrust of parental advice extends to pedagogy in general, and the instructional tone of ‘A Manual for Sons’ is undercut with surreal images of fathers ‘made of milk’, who see with ‘triangular eyes’ and who are ‘notable for their nonflogitiousness’ (a nonsense word possibly imitating ‘flagitiousness’).¹⁸⁴ This yields a parody of self-assured knowledge and patronizing expertise also not unlike Edward Lear, whose use of academic jargon in ‘Nonsense Botany’, and depiction of adults desperate ‘to edjukate’ a young boy in ‘The Youthful Cove’, contrasts the child’s imagination favourably to the pretensions of adult knowledge.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ Jerome Klinkowitz, *Donald Barthelme: An Exhibition* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1991), p.90.

¹⁸¹ Barthelme, *The Dead Father*, p.171.

¹⁸² Ibid., p.16.

¹⁸³ Ibid., pp.118-19.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ See Edward Lear, *The Nonsense Verse* (St Ives: Random House, 2012), p.216.

Falling as it does at the tail end of the long Sixties, Barthelme's *The Dead Father* is of use here mainly to signal the afterlife of the Animate Child. Moving through the 1970s and into the 1980s, child's 'play' does become primarily a vehicle for linguistic experimentation, and is stripped of much of its subversive potential. Larry McCaffrey is right to emphasize here that postmodernist 'nonsense writing' like Barthelme and Reed can be understood in proximity to structuralist and poststructuralist theories of language; just as nonsense writers aimed to 'teach the young that the world constructed by their elders is an artificial thing', Barthelme's portrayal of language's 'short-circuit' into constant 'reiterations' suggests objective truth is functional only through series of fragile 'meaning systems and semiotic codes'.¹⁸⁶ In this sense, that which could be called 'literary nonsense' merely points out the pretensions of any language which claims 'sense', hinting toward the primarily textual nature of the world. Much early postmodernism can thereby be seen to have presaged poststructuralist theories of language (which only gained a foothold in the American academy in the '70s and '80s) and the ability of the 'childish' to speak to both is reflected in the many later texts that engage with poststructuralist theory: DeLillo ends *The Names* (1982) with an extract from a story by the protagonist's son Tapp (complete with spelling and grammatical errors), and Peter Stillman the Elder in Auster's *City of Glass* (1986) implies the connection between Humpty Dumpty's and Derrida's views of language.¹⁸⁷ As the latter suggests, children's literature remains a useful store in later postmodernism, but it becomes harder and harder to specify just what constitutes 'children's culture' as the decades progress. Even in the Sixties, comic books and television cartoons are increasingly becoming directed toward young adults, and texts like Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* had become part of a collective adult vernacular thanks to songs like Jefferson Airplane's 'White Rabbit' and the idiomization of phrases like 'down the rabbit hole'.¹⁸⁸ The essentially mutual exchange of postmodernist literature and children's culture becomes even more entangled as authors like Barthelme start to write children's books, new works of children's literature begin to use postmodernist techniques, and older works of children's literature are approached as somehow 'postmodernist'.¹⁸⁹ The increasing scholarship upon 'postmodern' children's literature

¹⁸⁶ C.C. Anderson and M.F. Apseloff, *Nonsense Literature for Children: Aesop to Seuss* (Hamden, CT: Shoe String Press, 1989); David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing*, pp.220-45; Larry McCaffrey, 'Donald Barthelme and the Metafictional Muse', *SubStance*, Vol.9, No.2, Issue 27 (1980), pp.75-88 (p.76).

¹⁸⁷ See Don DeLillo, *The Names*, (London: Picador, 2011), pp.401-6; Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), p.81.

¹⁸⁸ Brian McHale has emphasized that allusions to *Alice in Wonderland* are 'so ubiquitous [...] in postmodern novels in particular that the presence of Alice might almost be considered a marker of literary postmodernism'; see *Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism*, pp.50-61.

¹⁸⁹ See, for instance, Cherie Allen, *Playing with Picturebooks: Postmodernism and the Postmodernesque* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012); and Lawrence R. Sipe and Sylvia Pantaleo (eds.), *Postmodern Picturebooks: Play, Parody, and Self-Referentiality* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008).

(particularly Early Readers and playbooks) should alert us to the significant overlap between the strategies of postmodernism and those of children's literature, but it becomes harder to designate children's literature as a 'source' of postmodernism. As will become a theme throughout this thesis, the increasing liminality between 'adult' and 'childish' artistic forms is a central feature of postmodernist literature, and betrays the cross-pollination of 'child culture' and the culture at large.

Afterlives of the Animate Child

Looking back at the child of early postmodernism from the vantage point of the 21st century, we can't help but feel the benefit of an ironic hindsight. Though August 1968 saw Hoffman and Rubin swear in a pig for president, and Ishmael Reed predict that student protestors would soon 'overthrow the government', the protests at the Democratic National Convention ultimately ended in arrests and beatings for the Yippies, and Nixon was in the White House by November.¹⁹⁰ As much as 1968 was a significant year for early postmodernist literature—with works like *Lost in the Funhouse*, *Willie Master's Lonesome Wife*, *Up*, *The Exaggerations of Peter Prince*, and *The Cat in the Hat for President* all released—it was also the year of the Tet Offensive, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr and Bobby Kennedy, and the failure of the Paris riots. Indeed, the year has become seen as such a turning point away from the utopian fervour of the 1960s that 1968 has been described as the birth of postmodernism 'as a social theory' by Agnes Heller, with its scepticism toward widespread societal change and emphasis upon more diffuse and entangled webs of institutional power and cultural hegemony.¹⁹¹ By the early seventies, proclamations made by Burroughs, Rubin and Hoffman about a generation of children ready to seize power from a weakened complex of adult control appear ridiculous; *Do It!* and *The Wild Boys* were ultimately published closer to the Watergate break-in than the Summer of Love, and as the details of Nixon's scandal unfolded, the idea of a youthful revolution transforming the country must have seemed a very far-off prospect indeed. It is for this reason that, though depictions of childish rebelliousness and unsupervised play remain commonplace in postmodernist literature, the presentation of children or child's play as a joyful counterpoint to more 'adult' realities are found less and less. As Katz asks in *The Exaggerations of Peter Prince*, how

¹⁹⁰ Shepperd, 'When State Magicians Fail', p.13.

¹⁹¹ Agnes Heller, 'Existentialism, Alienation, Postmodernism: Cultural Movements as Vehicles of Change in Everyday Life', in Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon (ed.), *A Postmodern Reader* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp.497-510 (p.503).

can one continue to use literary children to ‘play’ with narrative whilst real ‘children are burning’ in Vietnam and ‘the prisons of the world are stuffed with the innocent’?¹⁹²

Despite the shift away from the utopian visions of childhood toward a more nuanced view of the child in postmodernist literature after the long Sixties, the Animate Child does live on in many of the authors treated in this chapter. Pynchon’s celebration of ‘childishness’ continues long into his canon; his 1997 novel *Mason & Dixon*, for instance, is framed as a tall tale narrated by the Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke to the children of the LeSpark household, whose requests for swashbuckling adventures of pirates, Indians, and talking animals are humoured in Pynchon’s colourful account of the drawing of the Mason-Dixon line. In *Against the Day* (2005), the Traverse children, Dally Rideout, and the ‘Chums of Chance’ all tend toward a ‘Bad Boy’ animacy, and the sprawling novel closes with a slew of new births, including one baby girl delivered on an idyllic farm ‘teeming with children’ in a scene that bears clear debts to Fariña’s *Been Down So Long*.¹⁹³ Rebellious children recur in Burroughs’ later Red Night Trilogy and Ishmael Reed’s *Terrible Twos* and *Terrible Threes*, albeit shorn of much of their countercultural colouring and recalibrated to the politics of the day. In the 1980s, ‘90s and 2000s, works by Barthelme, Barth and Coover continue to make use of fairy tales and children’s stories, and Coover’s most recent novel *Huck Out West* (2017) explicitly recapitulates Mark Twain’s impish child characters onto the backdrop of the American Civil War.¹⁹⁴ The Animate Child does thereby live a belated ‘afterlife’ in the later work of many early postmodernist authors, but it becomes difficult to imagine the figure of a rebellious child as a figure of revolutionary intent by the nineties and 21st century; figures from Huck Finn to Dennis the Menace have long since lapsed into cliché, as seen in the ubiquity of Bart Simpson (a parody of all of the above) in everything from radio singles to t-shirts. As will be treated in my third and fourth chapters, the problem of ‘critical distance’ in the late capitalist economy frays much of the insurrectionary potential of the child, particularly since youthful rebellion remains very much the *lingua franca* of a commercialized American culture after the long Sixties—it becomes hard to figure Bart Simpson as an anti-establishment revolutionary in the popular imagination whilst products bearing the slogan ‘Eat My Shorts’ amass wealth for the Fox Corporation.

¹⁹² Katz, *The Exaggerations of Peter Prince*, p.163.

¹⁹³ See Thomas Pynchon, *Against the Day* (London: Vintage, 2007), pp.1065-72.

¹⁹⁴ Other notable examples are Barthelme’s ‘Bluebeard’ (1986), Barth’s *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor* (1991) and Coover’s *Pinocchio in Venice* (1991).

In truth, the Animate Child was anachronistic from its very earliest iterations in American postmodernism. These authors' depictions of children eschewing school and housework for rough-and-tumble games outside, superhero comics and pitchers of Kool-Aid are more representative of their own youth in the '30s and '40s than a child culture in the '50s and '60s that was not only becoming more heavily regulated by adult intervention (see, for instance, the Comics Code) but was beginning to be saturated by television. If the first half of the twentieth century had seen both the early efforts of an 'organized adult incursion into childhood' and, equally, 'children's most successful [...] assertion of play independence', the mid-century was the start of the full 'co-optation and commercialization' of child's play, as Howard P. Chudacoff notes.¹⁹⁵ That very few children in early postmodernism are seen watching television is conspicuous; between 1950 and 1960 television ownership in the United States shot up from nine percent to nearer ninety, and shows like the *Mickey Mouse Club* (first aired 1955) formed an early form of television programming aimed specifically at child viewers with little interest in pedagogical value.¹⁹⁶ The influence of television becomes much clearer in upcoming chapters, especially by the time authors who were born in the long Sixties themselves—most notably David Foster Wallace—start to emphasize the influence television had on their young lives. It is perhaps because authors like Pynchon, Reed and Burroughs did not enjoy this influence as a child that television is seen with a great deal of suspicion in their later canon, particularly for its entrancing effect on the young.

In one sense, it should not be surprising that the children depicted in these works seem historically misaligned with many facets of contemporary childhood. As has been emphasized, these children are at heart knowing literary representations, interpolated into narratives with little concern for mimesis or internal consistency. It is for this reason why echoes of the 'Bad Boy' narrative and the Romantic child are often so heavy-handed: they are hardly accidental. In Barthelme's *Snow White* the female protagonist remembers writing a book report on Romantic poetry, and in Sukenick's novel *Up*, one character cites Wordsworth when talking about how he only felt a 'sense of his own existence' as a child.¹⁹⁷ Such self-awareness makes it tempting to

¹⁹⁵ Howard P. Chudacoff, *Children at Play: An American History* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), pp.99, 154.

¹⁹⁶ http://www.tvhistory.tv/Annual_TV_Households_50-78.JPG , "Number of TV Households in America 1950-1978," *The American Century*, accessed June 18, 2019, <https://omeka.wlu.edu/americancentury/items/show/136>.

¹⁹⁷ Sukenick, *Up*, p.217.

dismiss their literary children as parodies or pastiche of the 'exhausted fictions' of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century child, but this would be to ignore a great deal of reverence they have for these views of childhood when re-appropriating them into more recognizable contexts. What we can say is that the temporal dislocation of the child in these depictions means that their vision of the Animate Child is at its core retrogressive, harking back to dated views of the child even as it imbues them with new life or figures them as figures of progressive change. One of the most obvious ways in which this is manifested is through a fairly glib vision of an intact 'child' (usually not identified by gender or race) which is seldom interrogated further; though the influence of Ariès would hardly have been felt by these writers at this time, the publication of *Centuries of Childhood* in the 1960s provides a timely reminder that the study of children was already drawn toward culturally and historically relative readings of childhood. This lack of variance is compounded by the authors themselves, whose experience of childhood is naturally skewed toward the perspective of a young boy, usually in a WASPish, middle-class household. Very seldom is it acknowledged that the nostalgic views of childhood and freedom upon which these authors lean may not have been shared by all children, and one feels part of the reason this vision of childhood joy falls so far out of fashion in the decades following the sixties is due both to an increased emphasis on local, 'personal' politics, and a subsequent focus on those stories of childhood that had often been elided. Though still imbued with postmodernist 'play', these depictions of childhood are not associated with fun and joy with such blithe confidence, and they show far more awareness of the contingencies upon which a 'happy childhood' rests.

Chapter 2: The Preterite Child

Like the previous chapter, ‘The Preterite Child’ owes its name to the work of Thomas Pynchon. A major component of *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973), Pynchon’s sense of the word derives from the noun ‘preterition’, meaning the act of ‘passing over’ or ‘leaving out’ some detail or evidence. From its earliest appearances in the seventeenth century it became associated by Puritan preachers with God’s omission of those not pre-destined or ‘elected’ for salvation, and it is in this way that Pynchon uses the term; those called the ‘Preterite’ are the ‘many God passes over when he chooses a few for salvation’, the ‘second sheep without whom there’d be no Elect’.¹ In Pynchon’s depiction of the entangled forces of death and destruction at the end of World War II—from the devastation of Europe to the legacies of European colonialism, with the atrocities of the Holocaust and Hiroshima looming uncomfortably in the background—the author extends this sense of ‘preterition’ to reams of victims ‘passed over by God and History’, and as a ‘metonymic device for oppression in the United States, and indeed the world’.² In such a novel, it is perhaps unsurprising that depictions of joyful youthfulness are rare, and most of the children of *Gravity’s Rainbow* are variously raped, beaten, brainwashed, murdered and tortured in ever more sadistic ways. Just as ‘Preterition’ functions as the opposite of ‘Election’ then, it could be said that the Preterite Child forms the obverse of the Animate Child: instead of evoking a lively freedom, these children are associated with submission and exclusion, and instead of vivacity they defined by scenes of death and suffering.

Literary Antecedents and Historical Contexts

The use of the child as a pitiable victim has clear literary antecedents. Perhaps the most famous is the child of Victorian literature; works by Charles Dickens, George Eliot, the Brontës, and Thomas Hardy are replete with images of neglected or sickly children, and the sentimentalized deaths of Little Eva, Helen Burns and Little Nell are among the most famous scenes in nineteenth-century Anglophone literature. As Naomi Wood points out, the ‘pathetic yet inspirational spectacle’ of child-death leant on Christian images of ‘angelic’ children (from the cherubic *Putti* in Renaissance painting to the Massacre of the Innocents) but infused them with

¹ Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.658-9; see also ‘Preterition’, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, at <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/150978#eid28252421> (accessed 18/02/2020).

² Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, p.357; Theophilus Savvas, *American Postmodernist Fiction and the Past* (London and New York: MacMillan, 2011), p.160.

recognizably contemporaneous concerns.³ This could range from the specific—*Oliver Twist*'s criticism of the workhouse, for instance, or Elizabeth Barrett Browning's presentation of factory conditions in 'The Cry of the Children'—to a more general lament for a 'pure' childhood stained by adult cruelty or irresponsibility, as in the case of *David Copperfield*, *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. In such novels we see the 'Heaven and Hell' of childhood, as Reinhard Kuhn has it, or rather a glimpse of childhood innocence as it struggles to persist in a fallen adult world.⁴ If the former represents simplicity and humility, in continuation of the Romantics' vision of redemptive youth, the latter represents an increasingly complex and entangled world beset by industrialization, social inequality, and, in the case of the United States, slavery. Eric J. Sundquist does note a 'proliferation of children in antislavery literature' in nineteenth-century America; here, the 'innate morality' of the child could appeal to hardened adults, and characters like Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* could show the natural innocence lurking beneath even a 'wild, rude heart'.⁵ We should not ignore the obvious racist, sexist and classist implications behind such depictions of pitiable children, which are often faced head-on by postmodernist authors, and will be treated in detail in the second half of this chapter.

As with the Animate Child, the depiction of the Preterite Child also bears the mark of more recent historical events. Many of the authors mentioned in this chapter grew up during the Second World War, or even served in the U.S. military, and their works are haunted by the cultural memory of young soldiers killed or injured during the war, alongside unprecedented civilian casualties on all sides. Added to this is the knowledge of the child victims of the Holocaust, still an unfolding topic in the 1960s; the genocide, conspicuous by its absence in American political discourse after the war, was thrown into the public eye with the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961 and the publication of Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews* the same year.⁶ The scale of the mechanized extermination of Jewish children is often implicit in the presentation of child suffering in postmodernist literature, in which the sentimentality of the

³ Naomi Wood, 2012. 'Angelic, Atavistic, Human: The Child of the Victorian Period', in *The Child in British Literature* ed. Adrienne Gavin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp.116-130; see also Patricia Healy Wasyliv, *Martyrdom, Murder and Magic: Child Saints and their Cults in Medieval Europe* (New York; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), pp.29-30.

⁴ See Reinhard Kuhn, *Corruption in Paradise: The Child in Western Literature* (Hanover; London: University Press of New England, 1982), pp.67-76.

⁵ Eric J. Sundquist, 'Introduction', in Eric J. Sundquist (ed.), *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.1-44 (pp.20, 25-7); Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly*, ed. Christopher G. Diller (Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2009) p.288.

⁶ See Kirsten Femaglich, *American Dreams and Nazi Nightmares: Early Holocaust Consciousness and Liberal America, 1957-65* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2007); and Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2001).

Victorian child's death is replaced with a blank-faced flattening of affect—a bleak acknowledgement of living in an age in which dead children are usually encountered in statistical form. As Christina Jarvis has noted, the looming influence of World War II in much postmodernist literature is also filtered through the lens of the Vietnam War, another live issue in the late '60s and early '70s.⁷ The death of young civilians in Vietnam became a repeated image in representations of the war; a favourite chant of anti-war demonstrators ran 'Hey, Hey, LBJ/How many kids did you kill today?', and Nick Ut's 'The Terror of War' won the Pulitzer Prize in 1973 for its depiction of a nine-year-old girl running from a napalm strike. Such images are also implicit in the *Preterite Child*, in which demonization of those 'adult' forces who would try to kill a child is accompanied by a recognition of American involvement amongst these forces, or even a sense of personal guilt for their mistreatment. Clearly, in the entangled world of postmodernity it is hard not to feel some level of complicity in the mass suffering of children.

As a wartime novel, *Gravity's Rainbow* proves a useful focal point for these ends. Its depiction of child suffering touches both the Second World War and Vietnam War, and its focus on the scramble to divide up post-war Europe looks ahead to the possibility of nuclear exchange during the Cold War. In addition, it lends a useful historical relevance to its evocation of the 'postmodern', particularly when periodizing postmodernist literature. Published in 1973, *Gravity's Rainbow* not only closes off the idealism of the long Sixties, but represents the start of a shift toward a 'focus on cultural theory' and a new attendance to 'the workings of power and the constitution of the subject', with which Hans Bertens and Andreas Huyssen have defined the postmodernism of the 1970s and 1980s.⁸ Partly, this reflects the shifting connotations of the term 'postmodernism' after the 'American domestication of French poststructuralism' in these decades; the term thereby becomes less a marker of artistic innovation or experimentation than a way to signal proximity to the theories of thinkers like Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and particularly Michel Foucault.⁹ Suitably, Pynchon's text has been read through the lens of all the above, and is thus often cited as the axiomatic text of 'literary postmodernism', on the cusp at which the term became 'entirely normalized as *the* term for the period's fiction'.¹⁰ Consonant

⁷ Christina Jarvis, 'The Vietnamization of World War II in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Gravity's Rainbow*', in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse Five* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), pp.61-84.

⁸ Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (Taylor and Francis, 1994), p.7; Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986), pp.166-7.

⁹ Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, p.180.

¹⁰ Brian McHale, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.65.

with a new ‘overriding interest in how language, knowledge and power are intertwined’, Pynchon centrally suggests that power is neither ‘held’ by dictators and political parties, nor is the privilege of a bourgeois class, but is best apprehended (if not understood) amongst an indiscernible network of institutions, discursive ‘norms’ and cultural hegemonies.¹¹ *Gravity’s Rainbow* artificially unifies these forces as ‘The Structure’, ‘The System’, or just simply ‘They’; this inarticulate controlling force (in reality, an array of control systems and micro-powers) creates and legitimates patterns of ‘submission and dominance’ in the reification of complex hierarchies of nationality, race, gender, sexuality, class, able-bodiedness, and even aesthetic taste.¹² Pynchon’s notion of the ‘Preterite’ thereby becomes a way to apprehend how certain values or beliefs taken as fact represent only the discursive manoeuvres of a privileged ‘Elect’, a central theme in much postmodernist literature.

There are clear reasons why this interest in the peripheries of a centred American culture (the ‘ex-centric’, in Linda Hutcheon’s terms) come to the forefront in the ‘70s and ‘80s.¹³ Aside from the increasing influence of a ‘deconstructionist postmodernism’, David Harvey proposes an economic logic to this period of ‘postmodernity’; in his view, the ‘crisis of overaccumulation’ that attended several economic crises at the end of the long Sixties (and was worsened by the time of Reagan’s cuts to public services in the 1980s) solidified a ‘rising tide of social inequality’ in the United States, through which ‘Otherness was produced with a vengeance’.¹⁴ In conjunction, the fervour for cultural theory in the academy was mirrored by a series of ‘fault lines’ in American politics (or what conservatives like Pat Buchanan would famously label ‘the culture wars’), as the lasting influence of the Black Power movement, the Gay Liberation movement, and various threads of Second-Wave feminism increasingly brought into the public eye the needs of marginalized communities and identities.¹⁵ Much postmodernism in the ‘70s and ‘80s reflects the influence of one or several of these cultural currents; feminism and postmodernism overlap in the work of writers like Bertha Harris, Rikki Ducornet, Kathy Acker

¹¹ Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, pp.75-6. For the Foucauldian dimensions of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, see Martin Paul Eve, *Pynchon and Philosophy: Wittgenstein, Foucault and Adorno* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); and Timothy Melley, ‘Bodies Incorporated: Scenes of Agency Panic in Gravity’s Rainbow’, *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Winter 1994), pp.709-738.

¹² Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, p.874.

¹³ See Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York & London: Routledge, 1988).

¹⁴ Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, p.64; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), pp.328, 331-2.

¹⁵ See Kevin M. Kruse, *Fault-Lines: A History of the United States Since 1974* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2019), p.199; Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

and Toni Morrison, for instance, and both Morrison and Toni Cade Bambara engage with the iconography of the Black Power movement.¹⁶ Here, the iconoclastic experimentation familiar from early postmodernists is geared less toward an irreverent postmodernist ‘play’ than an attempt to disturb, deconstruct or defamiliarize supposedly ‘objective’ histories and canonized ‘knowledge’; in addition, the ironic appropriation of ‘exhausted fictions’ after the ‘70s enacts both a re-apprehension of ‘traditional American values’ and a broader re-contextualisation of the historical past. These ‘re-writings’ and counter-histories may be informed by a ‘feminist imperative’, in the words of Martina Sciolino, but serve to deconstruct more widely ‘the kinds of subjects that are constituted in and by ideology: class subjects, race subjects, sexed subjects’, and, indeed, child subjects.¹⁷

As well as reflecting the cultural and political climate of the era, many of these texts also show points of intersection with contemporaneous issues of childhood. If the *Animate Child* was informed by the sudden influx of children after the Baby Boom, and a vogue for a more child-centred, permissive brand of parenting, the *Preterite Child* is informed by that which came after: namely, a series of economic crises that widened disparities between American families, a reactionary emphasis on family values that has supposedly been frayed by the excesses of the Sixties, and an increasing hysteria about child poverty, abuse, and abduction.¹⁸ As early as Joan Didion’s essay ‘Slouching Toward Bethlehem’ (1967), which documented starving and drug-addled children in the Haight-Ashbury Commune, young children are envisioned not as the focal point but the innocent victims of the counterculture, and post-Sixties Republicanism placed heavy emphasis on parental responsibility and familial togetherness. Though the rising divorce rate and economic crises of the ‘70s do form a potent image of familial decline, Elaine Tyler May and Isabel Heinemann are right to emphasize the various biases implicit within this narrative, which was often manoeuvred to suit the agenda of the Religious Right.¹⁹ Reaching a height in the

¹⁶ For a reading of Toni Morrison’s work in proximity to Black Power, see Justine Baillie, *Toni Morrison and Literary Tradition: The Invention of an Aesthetic* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

¹⁷ Martina Sciolino, ‘Kathy Acker and the Postmodern Subject of Feminism’, *College English*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (April, 1990), pp.437-445 (pp.438-9).

¹⁸ On the hysteria about child poverty and abduction in the 1980s, see Marilyn Ivy, ‘Have You Seen Me? Recovering the Inner Child in Late Twentieth Century America’, in Sharon Stephens (ed.), *Children and the Politics of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp.79-104.

¹⁹ See Isabel Heinemann, ‘Inventing the Modern American Family: Family Values and Social Change in 20th Century United States’, in Heinemann (ed.), *Inventing the Modern American Family*, (Frankfurt; New York: Campus Verlag, 2012), pp.7-29; and Elaine Tyler May, “Family Values”: The Uses and Abuses of American Family History’, *Revue française d’études américaines*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (2003), pp.7-22. For links between the crisis of the family and the wider economic and political crises of 1970s America, see Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction*

Reagan presidency of the '80s, the sanctification of 'family values' rested on a conception of the American family that was not only aggressively normative—implying a white, two-parent, nuclear family with adherence to Christian values and a clear separation of gender roles—but also fundamentally ahistorical, as Stephanie Coontz has noted.²⁰ Postmodernist authors both allude to this narrative of decline, featuring ubiquitous parental separation and familial dysfunction, and form a riposte to Reagan and Bush's emphasis upon personal responsibility; childhood unhappiness is more often than not rooted in much larger structural, material and historical patterns than this emphasis upon personal agency would have us believe.

In all, the Preterite Child is defined by myriad patterns of 'abuse', as Zofia Kolbuszewska has written of *Gravity's Rainbow*, and writers have to tread a fine line between uncovering the discursive and physical violence enacted upon children, and lapsing into mawkish depictions of child suffering.²¹ Oftentimes the use of irony, metatextuality or narratorial unreliability serves to undercut or disguise the latter, but if children are seldom wholly idealized, they are seldom wholly ironized either. In fact, the Preterite Child provides a useful avenue to appreciate the ethical imperatives of postmodernist literature, all too often underplayed in favour of emphasizing the prominence of linguistic 'play'.²² Though dense with the stylistic cues labelled above, one could hardly say that the use of children in *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *Blood and Guts in High School* lacks moral or ethical sense—as Cowart suggests of Pynchon, there is little doubt left as to these authors' views about racism, war, sexual violence and capitalist exploitation.²³ The fact that most of the children of the narrative are variously ill-treated or destroyed by these 'adult' forces does show a lack of the idealism that fuelled earlier writers, and if one can characterize much early postmodernism by its joyfulness, it should be emphasized that a post-Watergate postmodernism in the '70s and '80s is usually a fairly bleak and unhappy mode. Such a tendency, however, should not be dismissed as a kind of postmodern

Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

²⁰ See Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

²¹ Sofia Kolbuszewska, "It Has to Be More Than the Simple Conditioning of a Child, Once Upon a Time": The Use of the Child in *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Pynchon Notes*, Vol.42-3 (1998) pp.111-20.

²² Critics like Paul Maltby and Barbara Schwerdtfeger have previously underlined the ethical possibilities for postmodernist literature, but both recognize their goal as essentially revisionist. See Paul Maltby, *Dissident Postmodernists: Barthelme, Coover, Pynchon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); and Barbara Schwerdtfeger, *Ethics in Postmodern Fiction: Donald Barthelme and William Gass* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2005).

²³ David Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon and the Dark Passages of History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), p.84.

cynicism or irony—as will be seen, these scenes can prove key in postmodernist writers’ attempts to encourage empathy, or speak truth to power.

‘The Children’s Crusade’: *Gravity’s Rainbow* and its Postmodernist

Precursors

Though the postmodernist Preterite Child derives its definition from *Gravity’s Rainbow*, it does not truly begin with Thomas Pynchon. To be sure, Pynchon’s third novel has no shortage of child-victims, and has therein inspired two of the only article-length studies of children in postmodernist fiction (Strother Purdy’s ‘*Gravity’s Rainbow* and the Culture of Childhood’ and Zofia Kolbuszewska’s ‘The Use of the Child in *Gravity’s Rainbow*’); Purdy in particular emphasises the wartime tendency to elide child deaths in an undifferentiated civilian mass, proposing that the prominence ‘of children dead or about to die’ in the novel attempts to undo this erasure.²⁴ The many young characters who are killed, raped or lost amid the deteriorating European ‘Zone’—including the German boy Ludwig, the stage-child Bianca, and Franz Pökler’s daughter Ilse—does bring the child-victim to the fore even in a novel of several hundred characters. Yet as much as *Gravity’s Rainbow* looks forward to the postmodernism of the ‘70s and ‘80s, Pynchon’s third novel also owes much to earlier novels by black humourists like Kurt Vonnegut and Joseph Heller, notably the war fictions *Catch-22* (1961) and *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). Both might be considered as particularly cynical works of early postmodernism; they do share some of the ‘childish’ irreverence of authors treated in the last chapter (Heller’s novel contains a character named Major Major Major Major, whilst *Slaughterhouse-Five* borrows from pulp science fiction), but their sober depictions of wartime atrocities do not align themselves with the rebellious anti-war movements of the era so much as lament the human and psychological toll of these slaughters. Their tone thereby seems less ‘comic’ than ‘comitragic’, in David M. Craig’s terms, and their depictions of children do not connote youthful exuberance so much as vulnerability to the pervasive violence of war.²⁵ Employed as particularly pitiable victims, the child ultimately comes to signify the broader violence by which wars are justified, entrenched within an ‘adult’ world again hewn from the patriotic conservatism of the late ‘40s and ‘50s.

²⁴ Strother Purdy, ‘Gravity’s Rainbow and the Culture of Childhood’, in *Pynchon Notes*, Vol. 22-23 (1988), pp.7-23.

²⁵ David M. Craig, *Tilting at Morality: Narrative Strategies in Joseph Heller’s Fiction* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), p.71.

Oftentimes, Heller and Vonnegut's depictions of civilian casualties seem hewn from their own experiences during the Second World War. Heller's time on the devastated Italian Front informs Yossarian's wanderings in Italy toward the end of *Catch-22*, during which children are often centred as innocent or inadvertent victims of wartime violence. In the space of only a few pages, the novel describes a young boy forced to drink from a puddle, a 'nursing mother [...] holding an infant in black rags', a young Allied soldier with 'a small, pale boyish face' suffering convulsions from a mortal wound, and a man 'beating a small boy brutally in the midst of an immobile crowd'.²⁶ Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, drawn from his own experience of the Allied firebombing of Dresden, similarly favours images of children as innocent victims; from the ironic safety of a slaughterhouse, Billy Pilgrim reflects on the guards 'being killed with their families', as well as a group of 'teen-age girls' he had previously witnessed getting undressed, who were by then 'all being killed [...] in a much shallower shelter'.²⁷ Though these often seem anecdotal or documentary, the 'nauseating sight' of the child-victim—ignored by 'sullen, cowering crowd[s]' who are unwilling to engage with the fact—becomes re-centred as an essential recognition of the horrors of war.²⁸ This reaches extremes in Heller's novel, which refuses to sanitize the grisly details of the fact; Yossarian sees the young boy's 'molars and incisors' littered across the street, an unsettling emphasis on corporeality that recalls Kid Sampson's bisection by an airplane propeller.²⁹ Long referred to as the cause of McWatt's suicidal crisis of conscience, Sampson's death is finally described toward the end of the novel with the stark image of the boy's remaining 'two pale, skinny legs, still connected by strings somehow at the truncated hips'.³⁰ The description does show a disturbing lack of affect (and even a surreal humour) but in highlighting the boy's childish pallor and small stature Heller emphasises the tragedy of young soldiers killed by a war sanctioned by their elders.

Slaughterhouse-Five subsequently makes explicit reference to this fact, and the sense that these victims are elided or 'passed over'. In a metatextual twist, the narrator-writer of the novel is requested to name it 'The Children's Crusade' since, though soldiers are 'played in the movies by [...] glamorous, war-loving, dirty old men', they are ultimately 'fought by babies'.³¹ This emphasis

²⁶ Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage, 1994), pp.472-6.

²⁷ Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death* (London: Vintage, 2000), p.129.

²⁸ Heller, *Catch-22*. p.476.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p.388.

³¹ Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, p.11.

on the juvenility of soldiers is factually sound; teenage soldiers were not an uncommon occurrence amongst both Axis and Allied forces, many of whom lied about their age to join the military at aged fifteen or even less. In the American military this made them quite literally ‘preterite’—not only ‘left out’ but virtually non-existent—since their presence as ‘children’ would have been illegal, a paradox that makes the study of underage GIs a particularly difficult task.³² Even so, the existence of these underage soldiers (which inspired Kid Sampson and Huple in *Catch-22*) is hardly up for debate, and one shaky estimate places the death toll of American underage soldiers in World War II and Vietnam combined at 100,000.³³ The latter was perhaps even more so a ‘teenage war’ than the Second World War, and is mentioned several times in the 1970s ‘present’ of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, in which Billy Pilgrim’s rebellious teenage son is said to have run away from home to fight the Viet Cong.³⁴ Even beyond the youngest casualties, a fragile ‘childishness’ seems written into the victims of wartime more generally in Heller and Vonnegut’s novels; Snowden is remembered speaking with a ‘frail, childlike voice’ as he dies, and Billy Pilgrim’s PTSD (which causes silent fits of crying well into adulthood) is compared to the ‘Little Lord Jesus’ of ‘Away in a Manger’.³⁵ The quatrain from the carol, which serves as the novel’s epigraph, at once associates Billy as an ironic ‘Christ figure’ and a perpetual ‘child-figure’, since the already tenderfoot soldier is consistently brought back to memories of trauma in later life (hence his tendency to become ‘unstuck in time’ and relive those moments).³⁶ Moreover, the carol’s perverse silencing of infant tears enacts a ‘passing over’ of trauma in itself, echoing the fate of a generation of silent PTSD sufferers like Billy, and the preterite victims of conveniently ‘forgotten’ wartime atrocities like that of Dresden.

Even if the horrors of war take centre stage in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Catch-22*, their depiction of childhood suffering reaches much further. As per the repeated refrain of ‘So it goes’

³² See David M. Rosen, *Child Soldiers in Western Imagination: From Patriots to Victims* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015); and P.W. Singer, *Children at War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

³³ Joshua Pollarine, ‘Children at War: Underage Americans Illegally Fighting the Second World War’ (2008), *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*, no.191. Accessed at https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/191?utm_source=scholarworks.umt.edu%2Fetd%2F191&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages, 17/04/2020.

³⁴ More broadly, Christina Jarvis has emphasized the ‘Vietnamization’ of WWII in Vonnegut’s novel, inasmuch as the author ‘undermine[s] the privileged space “the good war” occupie[d]’ still in American consciousness. See Jarvis, ‘the Vietnamization of World War II’, p.62.

³⁵ Heller, *Catch-22*, p.501; Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, p.144.

³⁶ For Billy Pilgrim as a ‘Christlike’ figure, see the fourth chapter of David Simmons, *The Anti-Hero in the American Novel: From Joseph Heller to Kurt Vonnegut* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008). For a study on the depiction of PTSD in Vonnegut’s novel, see Susanne Veas-Gulani, ‘Diagnosing Billy Pilgrim: A Psychiatric Approach to Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*’, *Critique*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Winter 2003), pp.175-184.

in Vonnegut's novel, one feels that their wartime settings merely represent particularly egregious examples of an apparently inevitable human urge to master and destroy others. Another such example upon which Vonnegut places emphasis is the titular 'Children's Crusade', the famous failed thirteen-century crusade in which thousands of young people were either killed or sold into slavery.³⁷ An interpolated text explains the event as an idea by 'two monks' who 'got the idea of raising armies of children in Germany and France, and selling them in North Africa as slaves', after which 'half of [the children] drowned in shipwrecks' and 'the other half got to North Africa where they were sold'.³⁸ Accurate at least to the popular myth of the crusade, this account of the text's subtitle also comes to presage the 'Children's Crusade' in which Billy and his fellow P.O.W.s find themselves in, young 'babies' led, literally, to the slaughterhouse.³⁹ In *Catch-22*, Yossarian similarly links the suffering children that surround him to a longer lineage of young victims, which he struggles to reason away:

Every victim was a culprit, every culprit a victim, and somebody had to stand up sometime to try to break the lousy chain of inherited habit that was imperiling them all. In parts of Africa little boys were still stolen away by adult slave traders and sold for money to men who disemboweled them and ate them. Yossarian marveled that children could suffer such barbaric sacrifice without evincing the slightest hint of fear or pain. He took it for granted that they did submit so stoically. If not, he reasoned, the custom would certainly have died, for no craving for wealth or immorality could be so great, he felt, as to subsist on the sorrow of children.⁴⁰

Akin to the young pilgrims of the Children's Crusade, or the 'little boys [...] stolen away by adult slave traders', Yossarian here worries that the young sister of 'Natelly's whore' has ultimately been sold into prostitution herself—thereby confirming Milo's earlier stories of 'four-year-old pimp[s]' and 'eight-year-old virgins' selling sex for food and money across Italy.⁴¹

Though the exigencies of wartime are implicit in these children's desperate adoption of adult roles, then, the trend of children variously abused or abandoned by adults reflects a broader 'chain of inherited habit' that exists everywhere. In both *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Catch-22* unhappy childhoods are omnipresent: Billy Pilgrim is described as 'a funny-looking child' whose few

³⁷ Despite the popular idea of the 'Children's Crusade'—that thousands of children were tricked into slavery by the promise of pilgrimage—its historical basis is, predictably, much more complex. See Gary Dickson, *The Children's Crusade: Medieval History, Modern Mythistory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

³⁸ Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, p.11-12.

³⁹ See *Ibid.*, p.76-77.

⁴⁰ Heller, *Catch-22*, p.465.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.268.

memories include wetting himself at the Grand Canyon and being scared in Carlsbad Caverns; in the same novel, Roland Weary is said to have had ‘an unhappy childhood’ in which people mocked him because he ‘smelled like bacon no matter how much he washed’.⁴² Both Billy Pilgrim and Major Major Major Major are also mistreated by conservative Christian parents, the latter of whom was given his name as a cruel prank, ‘the first of a long series of practical jokes of which destiny was to make Major Major the unhappy victim throughout his joyless life’.⁴³ The sardonic depictions of Billy’s devout mother and Major’s ‘God-fearing, freedom-loving, law-abiding rugged individualist’ father shows fidelity to the distrust of regressive ‘adult’ values that defined much early postmodernism, but instead of rebelliousness they inspire meekness: Billy is repeatedly called ‘weak’ as a youngster, and Major Major is defined by ‘mediocr[ity]’.⁴⁴ Again, the suffering of children is rooted in the seemingly immovable yoke of adult-curated ‘traditional’ American values, amongst which the commitment to Christianity comes under particular scrutiny. In *Catch-22* Yossarian avers that God has simply ‘forgotten all about us’, a bleak acknowledgement of preterition in the face of the ‘Calvinist’s faith in predestination’ evinced by characters like Major’s father and Chaplain Tappman.⁴⁵ Even the Chaplain himself is said to have repeated and vivid nightmares about the violent deaths of his own children; for him also, ‘God’s mysterious ways’ seem to ‘subsist on the sorrow of children’.⁴⁶

Such doubt in the existence or benevolence of God runs also through much of Kurt Vonnegut’s work as a whole. As Robert T. Tally describes, Vonnegut’s work continually recalls a mid-century ‘existential angst’—the anxiety that one’s existence has no authenticity or purpose, tending toward a belief in the absurdity of all existence in general—which becomes particularly pronounced in a country whose ‘optimistic rhetoric’ does not tally with the bleak reality of American life.⁴⁷ His works thereby modulate between comic light-heartedness and sober reflection, to both question and undermine a belief in the fundamentally ‘good’ character of humanity, and in the ‘grand plan’ of a benevolent God who has overseen the destruction that Vonnegut witnessed first-hand. Such a clash of cartoonish exaggeration and bleak-faced realism (a ‘comic realism’, as Ryan Welper terms it) reflects some of the darker admixtures of ‘childish’

⁴² Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, pp.17, 25, 64-5.

⁴³ Heller, *Catch-22*, pp.97-8.

⁴⁴ Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, pp.17-30; Heller, *Catch-22*, p.95.

⁴⁵ Heller, *Catch-22*, pp.96, 206.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.311-12, 342.

⁴⁷ See Robert T. Tally, *Kurt Vonnegut and the American Novel: A Postmodern Iconography* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp.38-40.

and ‘adult’ that define the last chapter, such as Coover’s *The Cat in the Hat for President* or Katz’s *Creamy and Delicious*.⁴⁸ The ‘religion’ of Bokonon in Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle* (1963), for instance, is overtly founded upon ‘lies’ to engender ‘hope’, and abhors ‘Maturity’ and invites ‘laughter’ in its subjects.⁴⁹ This literal canonization of the ‘childish’ at the ransom of ‘adult’ (as well as its ironic repudiation of Christian dogma) invites comparison to the Animate Child, but by the end of the novel Bokonon provides less of a challenge to an elder generation than a lament for lost innocence. After the entire world is turned into ice by a science-fiction doomsday weapon, the brash childishness of Bokonon is reduced to an infantile whimper (‘Daddy, why are all the trees broken? Daddy, why are all the birds dead?’), and the child’s voice reappears as a fragile counterpoint to apocalyptic destruction.⁵⁰ Despite the novel’s early postmodernist bent toward playfulness, then, the ‘Cat’s Cradle’ of the title merely leaves us with the sheer inadequacy of this play in the face of a cruel ‘adult’ world:

For maybe a hundred thousand years or more, grownups have been waving tangles of string in their children’s faces. [...] No wonder kids grow up crazy. A cat’s cradle is nothing but a bunch of X’s between somebody’s hands, and little kids look and look and look at all those X’s [...] *No damn cat, and no damn cradle.*⁵¹

Touching again upon an early postmodernist distrust of parental authority, Vonnegut shows a lack of faith in ways in which ‘adult’ values are impressed upon children, evincing anxiety about the legitimacy of truth-claims more generally. A characteristically postmodern crisis of representation, children are centred as the most vulnerable to have these faulty ‘truths’ reified by adult pedagogy; as much as the absence of the cat and the cradle brings to mind an absent God, the real blame seems to fall at the feet of those ‘grownups’ who would perpetuate these values in their young.

If the admixture of ‘childish’ and ‘adult’ in much early postmodernism thereby represents an irreverent intrusion of juvenility into more serious or grave affairs, we can see that Vonnegut’s juxtaposition also works in the opposite sense. Though often comic, these depictions unsettle in their injection of adult experience into forms associated with childhood, and reveal the latter to be far less insulated from the concerns of adulthood than other postmodernists would have us

⁴⁸ See Ryan Wepler, “‘I Can’t Tell If You’re Being Serious or Not’: Vonnegut’s Comic Realism in *Slaughterhouse-Five*”, *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2011), pp. 97–126.

⁴⁹ Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat’s Cradle* (London; New York: Penguin, 2008), p.141.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.194.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.118.

believe. *Slaughterhouse-Five* repeatedly refers to the fairy-tale Cinderella, for instance, echoing the prominence of the form in Barthelme and Coover. Billy first watches a production put on by other prisoners in a 'shed', and laughs at the sight of male soldiers dressed up as a 'Blue Fairy Godmother'; however, this invitation toward comedy quickly becomes disquieting, as Billy's laughs turn to 'shrieks' and he has to be forcibly sedated.⁵² Vonnegut's contrast between the safety of a childish 'make-believe' and the pressures of a corrupted 'adult' world reappears later in the novel, when a shoeless and freezing Billy has to steal Cinderella's 'silver boots' for his own.⁵³ The ironic equation of Vonnegut's protagonist with the fairy-tale character ('Billy Pilgrim was Cinderella, and Cinderella was Billy Pilgrim') continues to emphasize Billy's essential childishness, but draws a sharp contrast to the 'happy ending' of the fairy-tale princess, and the trauma that the time-shifting narrative implies will remain in Billy's life after the war.⁵⁴ Allusions to Cinderella also appear in Vonnegut's next novel *Breakfast of Champions* (1973), in which the rich automobile magnate Dwayne Hoover becomes 'Fairy Godmother' to a young woman in need of financial aid; the section even comes complete with a crude drawing of a 'magic wand', one of many such illustrations that punctuate the novel.⁵⁵ Like Billy, the reconfiguration of Patty Keene into a postmodern Cinderella highlights her own miserable youth—as a teenager she was raped 'by a white gas-conversion unit installer named Don Breedlove'—but Hoover's vision of himself as a Fairy-Godmother also presages his growing delusions of grandeur.⁵⁶ Suitably, the character's final mental collapse is also rooted in the language of childishness, and during his climactic violent rampage he calls out 'Olly-olly-ox-in-freeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee' to his fleeing victims, and imagines his assaults as 'a game of African dodger'.⁵⁷

In one sense, the character's retreat in solipsism is thereby framed as a regression into an infantilism, but also reinforces the discomfiting incongruence of child's play turned toward bloody violence. Particularly given the reference to the racist carnival game 'popular when Dwayne was a boy', this violence seems all too often written into, or enacted upon, childhood; again, the moral failings of the 'adult' world are guaranteed by passing on these values to their children.⁵⁸ This is an essential fact of the Preterite Child—as much as these mistreated children

⁵² Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, pp.70-1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.105.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.135-7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.139.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.252, 260, 262.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.262.

often seem particularly luckless aberrations of fate, or even a synecdoche for the misery of existence as a whole, their preterition is still implied to be rooted in the structural reproduction of an exploitative and horrific 'tradition'. In *Breakfast of Champions* the violence seen at the end of the novel is presaged by the 'evil nonsense which children were taught', including Columbus' 'discovery' of America, and the essential differences between girls and boys.⁵⁹ Thus the roots of his violence reach further than the insanity of one man; Dwayne Hoover's violent rampage forms the climactic scene of the novel, but is foreshadowed by oblique references to a 'fourteen-year-old Midland City boy [who] put holes in his mother and father because he didn't want to show them the bad report card he had brought home'.⁶⁰ Clearly, the mental pressures that overwhelm Hoover belie his solipsistic outlook on life, and connect disparate characters in a network of proliferating childhood trauma that presages the work of Toni Morrison and David Foster Wallace. The self-aware 'narrator-writer', who boasts to his character-creations that he can make them do anything, provides an omniscient vista through which a reader is allowed to see the patterns of this unhappiness and provide a space for empathy, if only to realise how many have this lingering trauma in common. Dwayne Hoover's unhappy experience in an orphanage recalls the 'depressing childhood' of Kilgore Trout, for instance, and both of their sons ultimately run away from home in adolescence to join the military (like Billy Pilgrim's son in *Slaughterhouse-Five*).⁶¹ Elsewhere, Hoover's wife suicide by drinking bleach recalls the suicide of the narrator-writer's mother (and Vonnegut's own), and two minor characters, Patty Keene and Gloria Browning, are revealed to have been raped by the same man as teenagers.⁶²

The fact that the unhappiness of these characters is perpetuated by sexual violence, homophobia, and the military conscription of the young, shows the increasing realization that these traumas are patterned and structured, even at the level of lessons repeated at school, or prejudices voiced by cruel parents. Again, there is a sense that the 'war setting' in novels like *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Catch-22* merely acts as crystalline instances of the ways in cruelty, bigotry and self-aggrandizement are perpetuated in culture through the mistreatment and indoctrination of the young—it is for this reason that 'little kids [are made to] pledge allegiance even before they know what "pledge" and "allegiance" mean', as Colonel Black remarks in Heller's novel.⁶³ This becomes a central theme in Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, which makes clear the extent to

⁵⁹ Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*, pp.11, 25.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.50.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp.31, 65.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp.65, 139, 149.

⁶³ Heller, *Catch-22*, p.131.

which children's suffering is rooted in their co-optation by an exploitative 'adult' world. The Preterite Child is seen even more sharply in an author who, as the previous chapter suggests, so often finds in children and child culture an expression of subversive freedom and energy, and there are indeed traces of the Animate Child in Pynchon's third novel. Aside from the continued use of comic-book conventions, toys, and radio serials, we see the 'little girl [...] with a Shirley Temple smile' Slothrop rescues in London, or the boisterous 'singing duel' between a young girl and young boy.⁶⁴ Along with them, however, are a wealth of child victims, particularly in the lengthy third part of the novel. Set in the devastated European 'Zone' during the last months of WWII, Pynchon constantly returns to images of children who succumb to the pervasive deterioration that surrounds them: in episode 25 Slothrop finds, and then loses, an 'eight or nine'-year old called Ludwig searching for his pet lemming, and in episode 28 his appearance as the pig hero Plechazunga (donned for a group of enthusiastic children) is interrupted by a police raid in which he loses a 'tiny girl [...] clutching to his leg'.⁶⁵ Slothrop's inability to save these children recalls the broader fates of Bianca, a reluctant stage-child abused and murdered by her mother, and Ilse Pökler, a young girl who languishes in a concentration camp whilst her father entertains a succession of fake 'daughters' sent by his superiors.⁶⁶

Pynchon's increasingly bleak portrayal of childhood even infects his use of child culture, from Slothrop's superhero alter-ego as 'Rocket-Man' to the comic-book 'Floundering Four' section toward the end of the novel. As in Vonnegut, these show not so much the invulnerability of the child's imagination, or an irruptive 'childish' influence that undermines 'adult' seriousness, but attest to the dangerous ideologies implanted in children's culture. In Pynchon's parody of Percy Crosby's 'Skippy' cartoon, a figure called 'Mister Information' lectures a young boy about the circumstances of the war, but his light-hearted discussion of the journey from 'Pain City' to 'Happyville' quickly turns into a disturbing entreaty to 'eliminate completely' those who 'the War cannot use'.⁶⁷ Similarly, the 'Floundering Four' episode is rife with racist and sexist stereotypes, and leads into a jingoistic story entitled 'The Wisdom of the Great Kamikaze Pilots' (itself based on a real Disney cartoon).⁶⁸ Consonant with Pynchon's oftentimes fastidious attention to detail, the injection of racist and nationalistic sentiment in comic books and toys is very much grounded in historical fact; the description of the black superhero 'Maximilian, [...] suave manager of Club

⁶⁴ Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, pp.29, 423-5.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp.655, 677.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.722.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.763-4.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.806.

Oogabooga' recalls minstrel drawings in comics of the '30s and '40s, and Yoyodyne's 'Shufflin' Sam' and 'Juicy Jap' toys parallel the 'darkie toys' popular even up until the mid-century.⁶⁹ The journey of Yoyodyne from 'a toy factory in Nutley, New Jersey' to a multinational corporation that builds weaponry (and is implied to profit from child labour) seems particularly rich in symbolic value, but even this is inspired by real events: Sharon M. Scott notes that manufacturers like Strombecker and Louis Marx did indeed supply the U.S military during the war, and, after the war had ended, 'a number of American toy-soldier companies [...] extended their contracts with the military'.⁷⁰

Finding the 'adult' influence in child culture, Pynchon draws a key realization similar to Jacqueline Rose's famous idea of the 'impossibility of children's fiction'.⁷¹ Child culture is, after all, still predominantly created and curated by adults, and so liable to provide less a reflection of a child than an adults' conception of one, and provide a space where 'adult' ideology can be encoded and perpetuated. Thus if Pynchon does hold a 'helpless affection' for children and childishness throughout his canon, as Thomas Moore suggests, it is important to also note his recognition that young people are hardly immune to the ills of their culture—children in wartime Germany are shown to engage enthusiastically in 'anti-Semitic street refrain[s]' and children in England receive 'golliwog[s]' for Christmas.⁷² Centrally, in *Gravity's Rainbow* we have the presentation of Zwölfkinder, a theme park apparently inhabited and run by children:

In a corporate State, a place must be made for innocence, and its many uses. In developing an official version of innocence, the culture of childhood has proven invaluable. Games, fairy-tales, legends from history, all the paraphernalia of make-believe can be adapted and even embodied in a physical place, such as at Zwölfkinder [...] There was a child mayor, a child city council of twelve. Children picked up the papers, fruit peelings and bottles you left in the street, children gave you guided tours through the Tierpark, the Hoard of the Nibelungen, cautioning you to silence during the impressive re-enactment of Bismarck's elevation, at the spring equinox of 1871, to prince and imperial chancellor...child police reprimanded you if you were caught alone,

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.763-4, 800-1, 806. Sharon M. Scott, *Toys and American Culture: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), p.xxv

⁷⁰ Scott, *Toys and American Culture*, pp.313-14

⁷¹ See Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, Or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1994).

⁷² Thomas Moore, *The Style of Connectedness: Gravity's Rainbow and Thomas Pynchon* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987) p.20; Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, pp.193, 206.

without your child accompanying. Whoever carried on the real business of the town—it could not have been children—they were well hidden.⁷³

Though the childish ‘performance’ of authority throws a satirical eye toward the business of government and war, Pynchon again highlights the uncomfortable sight of children co-opted into shows of nationalism and racism. Amongst the ‘paraphernalia of the make-believe’ at Zwölfkinder we see children re-enacting colonial slaughters and playing at police brutality, a subtle hint toward those ‘hidden’ adult forces who ‘carried on the real business of the town’. It is for them that childhood, or at least an ‘official version’ of it, is revealed to be most expedient: their co-optation of the image of the ‘innocent’ child provides a way to sanitize, or at least obscure, their own ugly machinations.

With this in mind, Zwölfkinder provides the apt site for one of the two acts of sexual violence that define the novel. Upon a trip to the park with one of his fake ‘daughters’, Franz Pökler rapes the girl when he discovers her imposture, mirroring a scene in which Bianca Erdmann is made to perform a Shirley Temple burlesque to a leering crowd. Such sexualization of children is rife in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, signalling the ‘desirability, exploitation, and commodification of innocence’, as Simon De Bourcier has recognized, but also specifically how it is desired, exploited and commodified by and for adults.⁷⁴ For Pynchon, we might say that paedophilia acts as a visceral metaphor for the way in which the animate energy of the child is stifled, redirected and co-opted for ‘adult’ ends; one feels this is why images of ‘neglected or abused children’ and child-actors coincide so often in Pynchon’s novels, from young ‘Baby Igor’ of *The Crying of Lot 49* to Dally and the Zombini children in *Against the Day*.⁷⁵ Though these children often ‘perform’ animacy, Pynchon highlights the murky ethics of forcing a child to act toward an adults’ conception of the ‘childish’, especially with knowledge of the various abuses that go hand in hand with forcing monetized labour from children. Bianca Erdmann, who is heavily made up by her mother to look even younger than she is, recalls Fox’s real-life alteration

⁷³ Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, p.498.

⁷⁴ Simon de Bourcier, ‘Representations of Sexualized Children and Child Abuse in Thomas Pynchon’s Fiction’ in Ali Chetwynd, Joanna Freer and Georgios Maragos (eds.), *Pynchon, Sex and Gender* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), pp.145-161 (pp.145-6). De Bourcier rightly notes the influence of Nabakov’s *Lolita* here, since the relationship between Humbert and Dolores is essentially transactional, oftentimes swapping sexual intercourse for candy or toys.

⁷⁵ Mark Rohland, ‘“Feeling Totally Familied Out”: Teaching Pynchon Through Families’, in Thomas H. Schaub (ed.), *Approaches to Teaching Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49 and Other Works* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008) pp.46-51 (p.46). As well as the iconography of Shirley Temple (a favourite in Pynchon’s work) Pynchon evokes the irreverent actors of young vaudeville actors and fairy stars, particularly in *Against the Day*.

of Shirley Temple's birth certificate in 1934, a connection made explicit when Bianca is asked to perform a medley of Temple songs for an adult crowd.⁷⁶ The degeneration of the act into a sadomasochistic orgy in which Margareta beats her buttocks 'with a steel ruler' not only makes clear the implicit abuse Pynchon associates with the 'performance' of childhood, but also the ugly role of adults in exploiting these performances to sustain their own masturbatory fantasies of childhood.⁷⁷ Here we see the vital link between the sexual abuse of children and the desire to circumscribe and possess an 'ideal' child; it is thus that Pointsman's lust for children coincides with a desire to 'write on them his own brown Realpolitik dreams', and Franz Pokler's love for his substitutional daughters culminates in the violent sexual encounter at Zwölfkinder.⁷⁸ Inasmuch as the young are *tabula rasa*, they provide a valuable space to imprint adult fantasies of childhood, just as the sexualized beating of Bianca leaves literal 'imprints' with 'the red stripe of each blow', and 'tears [...] streaming down her inverted and reddening face'.⁷⁹

Such slippage between different kinds of child-love will be explored more in my fourth chapter, in which the 'childish adult' often relates to children in disturbing ways. For now, we should note the irony of characters like Slothrop and Franz, whose obsession with acting as rescuers of children belies their own child abuse. Whilst Franz entertains a series of fake daughters, the real Ilse languishes in a concentration camp; likewise, Slothrop's love for children coincides with a tendency to project onto them images of child-actors (particularly Shirley Temple), and his desire to help Bianca (whom he quickly sleeps with) contrasts with his negligence of the 'surprisingly fat kid of eight or nine' Ludwig.⁸⁰ Essentially, the obsession with images of 'ideal' children—both literal and metaphorical 'capitalist pornographies', in Vanya's terms—proves most harmful to 'real' children, and legitimates their continued suffering.⁸¹ As focal point between the intersection of 'idealization' and 'abuse' of children, Bianca is ultimately killed by her mother's obsessions, and her fate is made universal by the association of her mother with 'Shekinah', a perverted version of the Kabbalistic female God who 'wander[s] all the

⁷⁶ See John F. Kasson, *The Little Girl Who Fought the Great Depression* (London and New York: Norton, 2014), p.74. The practice of misrepresenting a child's age to be younger than it is, which Kasson notes was a 'a common practice with child performers' at the time, tessellates with the multiple commentators who have noted that, despite Slothrop's insistence that Bianca is '11 or 12', internal references in the novel place her age nearer sixteen. See Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, p.550; and Steven Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion: Sources and Contexts for Pynchon's Novel*, 2nd ed. (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2006), p.262.

⁷⁷ Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, pp.553-4.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.58, 498-500.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp.552-4.

⁸⁰ Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, p.655.

⁸¹ Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, p.184.

Diaspora' preying upon 'strayed children'.⁸² Kathryn Hume thereby suggests child-killing to be 'one of Pynchon's basic images': children represent the 'innocence unacceptable to', and therefore unsustainable within, a corrupted 'adult' world.⁸³ Whereas the Animate Child seems resistant to, or at least insulated from, these pressures, the Preterite Child cannot escape its fate; they are, in the language of Hansel and Gretel, destined for the 'Kinderofen'. It is for this reason that Pynchon's repeated use of the fairy-tale in *Gravity's Rainbow* (his own version of an ill-judged 'children's crusade') foregrounds the 'moment of maximum peril' for the young children without providing release or closure.⁸⁴ In one instance, the children's pantomime in 'Beyond the Zero' is interrupted by a rocket just as Gretel is 'winding up with her broom to hit the Witch'; in another, Blicero's abusive relationship with his 'Hansel' Gottfried ends with the boy's fiery sacrifice in the V-2.⁸⁵ Like the comic-book heroes of *Gravity's Rainbow's* last episode, and the multiple failures of Slothrop/Rocket-Man to save Bianca, Ludwig or Ilse, deliverance for these innocents will arrive, tragically, 'too late'.⁸⁶

In its lament for those who are 'left out', Pynchon's novel shows an increasing sense of the 'who' and 'how' of the Preterite Child as found in the work of Vonnegut and Heller. All are defined by child abuse which stretches far beyond their wartime setting, and beyond war in general; in both Vonnegut and Heller's existential visions of preterition, the necessity of suffering often seems written into a broader sense of the human condition. Both do allude to more specific structural and self-perpetual patterns of 'domination and submission' written into America's vision of itself, and passed down through repeated prejudice and pedagogy, but without any benevolent God to begin with, all will ultimately be 'passed over'. This sense is developed by Pynchon, in which the structural nature of 'preterition' is made clear—it is quite literally attributed to 'The Structure'—and the violence enacted upon children extends to an indoctrination or 're-making' of the child in the image of those evils with which Pynchon associates the Western vision of modernity. This includes the nationalistic bases of war, but also capitalism (children are made into a labour force, as child-actors), the hegemony of Reason and Western science (children are made subjects for Pointsman to indoctrinate, and represent the

⁸² Ibid., p.567

⁸³ Kathryn Hume, 'Pynchon's Mythological Histories', in Harold Bloom (ed.) *Thomas Pynchon* (Broomall, PA: Chelsea House Publishers), pp.131-144 (p.137).

⁸⁴ Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, p.122; see also Tom LeClair, *The Art of Excess: Mastery in Contemporary Fiction* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989) pp.57-8.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp.207, 895.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.892.

‘Max Weber charisma’ that is increasingly ‘routinize[d]’), and the racist logic of colonialism (the genocide of the Herero tribe in Southern Africa is made complete by the decision to stop birthing children).⁸⁷ As well as tracing the slaughter of WW2 back through these various ‘fork[s] in the road’, however, *Gravity’s Rainbow* also looks forward to evils more clearly rooted in the world of the late twentieth century, such as multinational capitalism, the ‘inanimate’ world of high technology, the reification of simulacral ‘pornographies’, and the diffusion of culpability through an endlessly ‘routinize[d]’ bureaucracy. Just as Dickens’ vision of child suffering was based in the industrialized world of the nineteenth century, one can see in Pynchon an association of child abuse with the injurious effects of late capitalism, a thread which will be picked up in more detail in the next chapter. One of these most harmful of these effects lies in the adult infiltration and organization of child culture, and the delineation and reproduction of an ‘ideal’ child for adults: like Franz or Slothrop, whose treatment of fictive and real children do not sit easily with one another, these fictions of happy or sympathetic children often prove most harmful to real children, a key thread in subsequent iterations of postmodernism.

‘Feminist Postmodernism’: Fictions of Girlhood in the ‘70s and ‘80s

Pynchon’s resistance toward monolithic visions of the ‘ideal child’, curated and exploited by adults, brings into sharp relief the various features of identity that this ideal ‘passes over’. One of the most obvious is that of gender difference, and critics like Joanna Freer and Simon De Bourcier have underscored the worrying implications of Pynchon’s depictions of paedophilia; whilst a repeated image in postmodernist literature, it is hard to miss the fact that this child-rape is almost always conceived of between an older man and younger girl.⁸⁸ Episodes like the Shirley Temple burlesque or Nabakov’s *Lolita* may be reflective of the historical ‘rediscovery’ of father-daughter abuse after the Second World War (as Judith Herman has highlighted), but they also risk recapitulating images of sexually seductive ‘little girls’ even as they register alarm at varied forms of child abuse.⁸⁹ The eroticization of young girls like Temple has been emphasised by James Kincaid amongst others, and critics have noted the extent to which the male gaze sexualizes femininity in terms of ‘childishness’ more broadly (locating positive traits in youth,

⁸⁷ Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, p.551-2. Though Thanatz is here talking about the V-2 Rocket, he describes it specifically in childish terms—as a reincarnation of the Baby Jesus ‘with endless committees of Herods out to destroy it in infancy’.

⁸⁸ de Bourcier, ‘Sexualized Children’, pp.145-161.

⁸⁹ See Judith Lewis Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

virginity and hairlessness).⁹⁰ As Ilana Nash argues, the ubiquity of these fetishized images of girlhood constructs the female sexual subject as an exterior and docile ‘Other’, made to be mastered by a centred, more mature masculinity; thus the sight of Shirley Temple being handled by older men figures the feminine not only as an ‘immature’ force made to be ‘civilized’ by men, but also an erotic object made to be sexually dominated.⁹¹ Essentially, the (illusory) asexual nature of ‘little girls’ preordains a view of the female subject that is both tailor-made for the male gaze, but necessarily ‘innocent’ or ‘unknowing’ of its own sexual potential. This potential is reduced instead to a self-effacing ‘cuteness’, which not only circumvents female erotic agency, but presages various ‘myths’ of femininity as defined by passivity. As Sianne Ngai has pointed out, many of the connotations of the ‘cute’—including ‘smallness, compactness, softness, simplicity, and pliancy’—evoke a wider sense of ‘helplessness, pitifulness, and even despondency’, and thus tends to be intertwined with a sense of powerlessness.⁹² We need only look at the overwhelmingly male-dominated Animate Child and its antecedents to see that mischievousness often seem the privilege of young boys in American literature; young girls, on the other hand, bear the double expectations of childish ‘purity’ and feminine propriety, expressed in an embryonic form in a shy ‘cuteness’.⁹³

Along these lines, more explicitly gender-minded interrogations of literary girlhood can be found in a thread of experimental literature in the ‘70s and ‘80s by authors like Lisa Alther, Erica Jong, Bertha Harris, Rikki Ducornet and Kathy Acker. Born out of the principles and methodologies of Second-Wave feminism, these works coincide with the rise of cultural theory in the academy and a broader interest in the ‘personal politics’ of American life. Theirs can

⁹⁰ See, for instance, James Kincaid’s *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998); and *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994). For the eroticization of the ‘childish’ woman, see Cynthia Carter & C. Kay Weaver, *Violence and the Media* (Buckingham & Philadelphia, Open University Press, 2003) pp.121-5; and Fay Bound Alberti, *This Mortal Coil: The Human Body in History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp.76-82.

⁹¹ Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in American Popular Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp.6-8, 19-20. For a feminist reading on the childish body, see Lori Merish, ‘Cuteness and Commodity Aesthetics: Tom Thumb and Shirley Temple’, in Rosemary Garland Thomson (ed.), *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp.185-203.

⁹² Sianne Ngai, ‘The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde’, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Summer 2005), pp.811-847 (p.816). Ngai’s essay ultimately suggests that this ‘aesthetic of powerlessness’ (p.814) can be ‘the source of an unexpected power in the domain of political action’ (p.383), but only insofar as it is distanced from society by its ineffectuality ‘with regard to action in society’ (p.842).

⁹³ This disparity between boyish ‘mischief/bad behaviour’ and girlish ‘seriousness/good behaviour’ remains a key issue in child studies; see Amanda Coffey and Sara Delamont, *Feminism and the Classroom Teacher: Research, Practice and Pedagogy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.21-3; and Susan Jones and Debra Myhill, ‘Troublesome Boys and Compliant Girls: Gender Identities and Perceptions of Achievement and Underachievement’, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 25, No. 5 (November 2004), pp.547-561.

therefore be said to be a kind of ‘feminist postmodernism’ or ‘postmodern feminism’, in the words of Pitchford and Sciolino, in the sense that they adopt many of the narrative strategies of early postmodernism (like irony, pastiche, metatextuality and the unreliable narrator) to ‘[work a] reader through a deconstruction of the female subject’ and demonstrate the extent to which it is variously ‘written by patriarchy’.⁹⁴ This is often literally the case in works like Erica Jong’s *Fanny* (1980) or Acker’s *Great Expectations* (1982), which parody the work of John Cleland and Dickens respectively, but the intertextual logic of these writers shows a broader attempt to locate and undermine the ‘myths’ of woman as reified through canonical works of literature. Here, the centring of young girls is particularly significant: key critical contributions by Shulamith Firestone, Jane Helleiner and Rachel Rosen have emphasized the potential for overlap in the methodologies of child studies and feminist theory,⁹⁵ since girls (faultily seen as ‘women-in-becoming’) are submitted to the gendered socialization that will ensure a passage into ‘typical’ womanhood, and since the ‘90s, the field of ‘girl studies’ or ‘girlhood studies’ has begun to dislocate itself from ‘child studies’ more broadly.⁹⁶ In turn, feminist readings of childhood studies have found interesting points of overlap between the myths of ‘woman’ and ‘child’, in their emphasis upon vulnerability, domesticity and the hegemony of the nuclear family.⁹⁷ Fictions of girlhood thus provide a valuable space to see how these processes of socialization work, and to test the extent to which a ‘childishness’ is written into the female subject by androcentric discourse. This relation between women and children comes into sharp relief in narratives in which the child, as perceived by an older woman, comes to represent less the freedom of the *Animate Child* than the expectation toward domesticity, and the memory of a restricted youth.

Unsurprisingly, children seen by these female authors’ eyes are therefore far less idealized than that of their male counterparts. At the beginning of Lisa Alther’s *Kinflicks* (1976), the jaded

⁹⁴ Martina Sciolino, ‘Kathy Acker and the Postmodern Subject of Feminism’, *College English*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (April. 1990), pp.437-445 (pp.438-9); see also Nicola Pitchford, *Tactical Readings: Feminist Postmodernism in the Novels of Kathy Acker and Angela Carter* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002).

⁹⁵ See in particular the chapter ‘Down with Childhood’ in Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971); Jane Helleiner, ‘Toward a Feminist Anthropology of Childhood’, *Atlantis*, Vol. 24, No. 1, (Fall/Winter 1999), pp.27-37; and Rachel Rosen and Katherine Twamley, ‘The woman-child question: a dialogue in the borderlands’, in Rosen and Twamley (eds.), *Feminism and the Politics of Childhood: Friends or Foes?* (London: UCL Press, 2018), pp.1-20. We could even include a text as foundational as *The Second Sex* in this bracket; see the chapter ‘Childhood’, in Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009).

⁹⁶ See Mary Celeste Kearney, ‘Coalescing: The Development of Girls’ Studies’, *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 21, No.1 (Spring 2009), pp.1-28.

⁹⁷ See, for instance, Barrie Thorne and Marilyn Yalom (eds.), *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992).

narrator Ginny remarks of an overexuberant infant that she ‘suddenly underst[ands] the rationale behind child labour’, betraying the bleak pessimism with which she associates her relationship with her daughter, and her recollections of childhood.⁹⁸ The novel’s interspersed of Ginny’s adult life with remembrances of youth invites linkages between the character’s struggles with divorce and her dysfunctional family life as a child; it is said that her domineering and military-obsessed father (only called ‘the Major’) made his children play in a homemade bomb shelter, and her depressed mother habitually rehearsed her own funeral at dinner.⁹⁹ Her parents’ obsession with death, which feeds into their young girls’ doll-funerals and games of nuclear war, seems both a Vonnegutian acknowledgement of the existential absurdity of the Cold War, and the symptom of a broader resistance to change that is distinctly gendered.¹⁰⁰ Ginny’s mother pines for days when ‘children were expected to defer to their parents in everything’, and feels uncomfortable as her young girls grow into puberty, declaring that she ‘would have arrested their development at around age five’.¹⁰¹ Recalling early postmodernists’ hatred of parents, Ginny’s mother and father seem bound to a series of regressive values against which Ginny grates, mostly centred around the conception of girlhood as both politely acquiescent and essentially asexual. Though much of this comes to the fore during the presentation of Ginny’s adolescent sexual experiences (touching on the same iconography of youth rebellion that inspired the *Animate Child*), the denial of female sexual maturity starts much younger; her prudish parents fail to tell Ginny about menstruation, and she remembers thinking that ‘[she] had dislodged some vital organ [...] and was haemorrhaging to death’ during her first period.¹⁰² Such traumatic first experiences of menstruation, and the lack of instruction or understanding surrounding menstruation as a facet of girlhood more broadly, is a repeated image in much postmodernism written by women: in Kathy Acker’s *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula* (1973) the young narrator’s mother tells her that menstrual blood is just ‘carrot juice com[ing] out of her’, and in Rikki Ducornet’s novel *The Stain* (1984) her young protagonist Charlotte believes it to be a sign of Christ’s stigma.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Lisa Alther, *Kinflicks* (Virago, 1999), p.17.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.7-9.

¹⁰⁰ For more on the dynamics of the Cold War in postmodernist fiction, see Daniel Grausam, *On Endings: American Postmodernist Fiction and the Cold War* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.388.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.40.

¹⁰³ Kathy Acker, *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*, in *Portrait of an Eye: Three Novels* (New York: Pantheon, 1992), pp.1-90 (p.64); Rikki Ducornet, *The Stain* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995), p.170-1.

The denial of menstruation as one of many taboos surrounding the female body (particularly as it enters puberty) touches a common thread in the work of Second-Wave feminists. As early as *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir emphasises the ‘shame’ surrounding the onset of female compared to male puberty; the ‘social context’ that marks out the growing penis as a sign of strength marks out menstruation as a ‘malediction’.¹⁰⁴ Thus whereas young boys can ‘joyfully assume the dignity of being male’ during puberty, ‘to become a grown up, the girl must confine herself within the limits that her femininity imposes upon her’ by a dominant ‘social context’.¹⁰⁵ As in so much postmodernism, this ‘social context’—essentially a hegemonic male-centred discourse ossified by ‘tradition’—is embodied in a set of dogmatic and authoritarian parents, and (perhaps surprisingly) mothers in particular. Whereas fathers represent a stern but inattentive influence, present only to occasionally scold or leer over their daughters, mothers linger on, bringing into sharp relief their daughters’ diversions from older conceptions of femininity. Their internalized misogyny yields a mixture of contempt and pity, and it must be said that authors like Alther and Jong are far more sympathetic to the business of parenting than early postmodernists. Despite fast-changing social mores which leave Ginny’s mother feeling disoriented in *Kinflicks*, she reveals herself to be measured by the many of same conceptions of womanhood as her daughter, feeling a ‘failure’ as a wife and mother.¹⁰⁶ These are fears that Ginny herself expresses over the loss of her daughter in divorce, and her disagreements with her mother belie the amount they have in common—Ginny wonders if ‘her mother [had] felt the same things about her’, and if these experiences of girlhood might be cross-generational.¹⁰⁷ In *Kinflicks* and Erica Jong’s *Fear of Flying* (1973), this tangled association of daughters and mothers also comes to represent a younger generation’s ambivalence toward childbearing, especially as they reach womanhood. Whilst they grate against the idea of living as housewife and mother (and a view of sex as purely monogamous and procreational) such narrators often fantasize about children as extensions of themselves; just as Ginny sees her child to be a ‘hostage against [her] Death’,¹⁰⁸ the candid narrator of Jong’s novel wants ‘to have a little girl who’d grow up to be the woman I could never be’.¹⁰⁹ Almost always young girls, these prospective children are seen as a way to finally cultivate an ‘independent’ femininity with ‘no scars on the brain or the psyche’.¹¹⁰ The presence of their unhappy mothers, and memories of their unhappy childhoods,

¹⁰⁴ de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, pp.340-1.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Alther, *Kinflicks*, p.389.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.111.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.438.

¹⁰⁹ Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying* (London; Vintage, 1998), p.51.

¹¹⁰ Jong, *Fear of Flying*, pp.51-2.

however, foregrounds the fictitiousness of these young children, and the difficulties of motherhood that these idealized fictions pass over.

In conjunction with the pressures of parents, young girls' 'scars on [...] the psyche' are inscribed by a wealth of repressive institutions that solidify the association of girlhood with a patriarchal policing of childish autonomy. Bertha Harris' *Confessions of a Cherubino* (1972) for instance, starts at a girls' boarding school, and much of the action of Ducornet's *The Stain* (1982) takes place in and around an eighteen-century French nunnery. In both, the 'authority' held by these institutions often seems an excuse to exploit or control; male and female teachers in Harris' novel sleep with students, and the cartoonishly drawn 'Exorcist' in *The Stain* tries to 'cure' the young nuns of demonic possession by sleeping with them. Like euphemised depictions of menstruation, these discursive manoeuvres are inextricably tied to the feminine body, and mainly serve to demonize or inhibit female sexual agency.¹¹¹ The lesbianism of the two young girls at the heart of Harris' novel is variously associated with physical or spiritual sickness; Margaret has apparently spent most of her childhood in a sickbed, and carries a crucifix everywhere to ward off the demons she believes have haunted her since infancy.¹¹² Similarly, the 'stain' at the heart of Ducornet's novel is a birthmark upon Charlotte, interpreted by her puritanical aunt and local nuns to be a symbol of her mother's 'sin of lust', since Charlotte was born out of wedlock.¹¹³ Confirming Nancy Fraser's notion that 'women's biology has nearly always been interpreted by men', Ducornet makes clear that the 'reading' of Charlotte's birthmark is the privilege of patriarchy, which reconfigures the shape of the playful 'dancing hare' into a demonic 'Evil Eye'.¹¹⁴ Consequently, much of Charlotte's childhood is dedicated to the masochistic pursuit of bodily 'purity' and 'spotlessness'; her aunt tries to wash away Charlotte's birthmark 'with a pig-bristle brush' that leaves her 'raw' and 'bleeding', and Charlotte begins a routine of self-flagellation, expressed predominantly in the perverse ritual of eating glass and then 'vomit[ing] blood, ropes of it, Exultant'.¹¹⁵ Focalized through her youthful mind, this violent masochism is rendered unsettlingly carefree, pictured as analogous to the 'Princess who weeps diamonds' in a

¹¹¹ This bears connections to Foucauldian theory, and has been made clear by many feminist studies of 'bio-power': see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), pp.17-49; Lori Reed and Paula Sakkho (eds.), *Governing the Female Body: Gender, Health, and Networks of Power* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2012); and Victoria Louise Newton, *Everyday Discourses of Menstruation* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016).

¹¹² See Bertha Harris, *Confessions of a Cherubino* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), pp.16-19.

¹¹³ Ducornet, *Stain*, p.58.

¹¹⁴ Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism* (London; NY: Verso, 2013), p.49; Ducornet, *The Stain*, pp.38-9.

¹¹⁵ Ducornet, *Stain*, pp.55, 73.

typically postmodernist collapsing of childish innocence and adult experience.¹¹⁶ Again, whilst the child's mind is pictured as particularly vulnerable to being 'written upon', Charlotte's internalization of the vitriol directed at her since birth is depicted as a bodily violence, literally forcing 'down her unwilling throat' this vision of sexless and acquiescent femininity.¹¹⁷

Harris' and Ducornet's depiction of the role by which these institutions (specifically pedagogical institutions) play in sexual power relations mirror much contemporaneous theory associated with postmodernism, particularly Foucault's notion of the process by which such institutions codify patterns of control in knowledge.¹¹⁸ In the nunnery of *The Stain* Charlotte's birthmark and menstruation are interpreted as a sign that she is to be martyred; her self-harm, meanwhile, is reconfigured as a necessary 'Purification' to prepare her for 'the Fiery Kiln of Beatitude'.¹¹⁹ The irreverent tone of the novel consistently shows this Puritan logic to be nonsensical—the Mother Superior, for example, sanctions her own lust since 'the price of pleasure is guilt', 'Guilt leads to [...] Humiliation', and 'Humiliation leads to God'—but its reiteration continues to shape Charlotte's impressionable mind.¹²⁰ In *Confessions of a Cherubino*, Ellen similarly feels that she has to remain a model student and a 'make-believe daughter' despite the obvious incongruities in her school's logic; one parodic section imagines a trial in which it is averred that reading too much Greek tragedy led her to stray from 'her true destiny as wife, homemaker, mother of decent American citizens', laying bare the central tension in her school's Classical syllabus and silencing of her (homo)sexuality.¹²¹ Her desire to no longer 'enact the roles of chaste and displeasing daughter' and to embrace an authentic subjectivity (and sexuality) can only be actuated in daydreams of burning down her family home, and in imagining herself as the mischievous and androgynous 'Cherubino' from Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, a young male character usually played by a woman.¹²² Though such slippages of gender and sexual desire are rendered safe in a school syllabus that treats them as pure 'fictions', the intertextual nature of Harris' novel leads to a metaleptic 'breaking through' of these fictions into *Confessions of a Cherubino*'s narrative; just as she and Margaret play out the coy flirtations of Cherubino and the

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.55-6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ For a study on Foucauldian dynamics in educational spaces, see Stephen J. Ball (ed.), *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

¹¹⁹ Ducornet, *Stain*, p.68.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.93.

¹²¹ Harris, *Confessions*, pp.33, 79.

¹²² Kara Russell, 'Bertha Harris' *Confessions of Cherubino*: From L'Ecriture Feminine to the Gothic South' (MA dissertation, 2018) *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 3401. <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/3401> (accessed 02/04/2020).

Countess, Ellen's part in a school production of *The Women of Troy* ends with 'real blood [...] from real flesh', as she attacks the teacher with whom she had had intercourse.¹²³ Whilst this actualisation of the play's violence speeds Ellen away from the confines of her boarding school, her lover Margaret is left behind to continue in her tragic role as Cassandra—her desire for 'Somebody [to] love' is treated as madness, and her growth into adulthood ultimately signals a decline into more sickness and solitude.¹²⁴

These intertextual dynamics of gender and sexuality are played out in much postmodernism written by women in the '70s and '80s. Rather than a means to initiate a disinterested linguistic 'play', the re-writing of 'exhausted fictions' here becomes a way to defamiliarize and re-apprehend the 'myths' of womanhood reified through the literary canon, particularly erotic or romantic narratives. It is through them that young girls are 'brainwashed' to have a 'mind full of [...] soupy longings', in Erica Jong's terms, since they encounter the female literary presence as little more than a passive object waiting to stir the active male poetic imagination.¹²⁵ Texts like Jong's own 1980 novel *Fanny* (which rewrites John Cleland's 1748 *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*) instead aim to uncover these discursive manoeuvres, whilst reconfiguring young girls as active participants in the erotic dynamics of the story. Both come to the fore at the beginning of Jong's novel; contrasted to Cleland's Fanny, who has her first sexual experience in a London brothel, Jong's teenage Fanny is instead molested by a fictionalized Alexander Pope.¹²⁶ This literalization of the violence done to young women by love poetry partly rests upon Fanny's misreading of the mock-heroic 'Rape of the Lock' (unbeknownst to her, the 'tender Heart' she associates with Pope's verse is performative) but Pope's use of the poem's language to justify his own rape shows it to be exploitable even as obvious cliché.¹²⁷ Jong's pastiche of eighteenth-century picaresque also places her in the satirical continuum that Pope inhabits, ironically appropriating his work even as he appropriates the epic—as Fanny later remarks of a woman's erotic stage performance, she 'mockt her Audience as much as they mockt her'.¹²⁸ Consonantly, Fanny does not remain a passive sexual victim to Pope's exploitation but submits him to a disparaging sexual gaze herself; his premature ejaculation recalls an earlier scene

¹²³ Harris, *Confessions*, p.64.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.209.

¹²⁵ Jong, *Fear of Flying*, p.10.

¹²⁶ Erica Jong, *Fanny: Being the True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones* (London & New York: Norton, 2003), pp.41-2.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.23.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.65.

in which Fanny, spying on him through a 'Keyhole', finds his 'Masculine Engine [...] a tiny piddling Thing, not deform'd, but Toy-like'.¹²⁹ Not only does her interest in Pope's sexual organ undercut the assumption of girlhood as asexual or sexually unknowing, but also plays on what Mark Breitenberg has termed 'anxious masculinity' with reference to depictions of cuckoldry and impotence, disempowering the older man as sexual subject.¹³⁰

Jong's reorientation of the dynamics of father-daughter sex abuse thereby plays a delicate balance between acknowledging the sexual violence inflicted upon young girls and keeping their sexual agency intact. As well as her encounter with Alexander Pope, Fanny is molested by her adoptive father Lord Bellars, who again refers to her beauty 'in terms borrow'd from the Playhouse' before an 'Ecstasy [...] mutual and compleat'.¹³¹ Jong's emphasis on the female orgasm again pictures the young girl as a 'desiring subject' whilst warning of the female body's co-optation by the male poetic imagination. As with Pope, who lectures her on the 'Absurdity' of a female poetic imagination whilst he 'wiggle[s] a finger into that tender Virginal Opening', Jong's irreverent collapsing of a male poetic voice and male lasciviousness shows Fanny's mind to be vulnerable to the language of love poetry; from a secret letter Fanny discovers that her father desired to seduce her for 'Capital Sport', to titillate one of his various mistresses.¹³² Like *Confessions of a Cherubino* and *The Stain*, girlhood for Jong is clearly associated with a time of naïve bad faith, fed by Foucault's 'institutional devices and discursive strategies' to which they, as children, are particularly subject. Thus their young protagonists' flight from the institutional bounds of home, school and convent life also signal a step toward a more mature authenticity.¹³³ Given that this absconding occurs during mid-to late-adolescence, *Fanny* and *The Stain* in particular take on much of the character of a bildungsroman, or even künstlerroman, since their protagonists' self-realization is found through artistic creation: Charlotte's flight from convent life in *The Stain* leads her to take up painting, banned in childhood as an extra-Christian extravagance, and Fanny's adventures away from home are eventually chronicled in her sensuous epic *The Pyrtiad*. Recalling Barth's conflation of sexual and literary expression, Fanny's artistic creativity is accompanied with an embrace of the erotic, but Jong, Alther and Harris' greater appreciation for the gendered implications of sexual repression means that they place greater

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.36.

¹³⁰ See Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹³¹ Jong, *Fanny*, pp.52, 48.

¹³² Ibid., pp.41, 52

¹³³ Foucault, *History of Sexuality I*, p.30.

emphasis upon their young girls' conscious rejection of 'respectability' as an embrace of apparently 'degenerate' or 'deviant' cultures—Charlotte falls in with the 'gnomish drunk' Poupine, Ellen runs away to a bar and adopts the alter-ego 'Eustasia Vye', and Fanny finds herself amongst pirates, highwaymen, and prostitutes.¹³⁴

The growth toward maturity seen in these feminist bildungsromane thereby consists of what Teresa de Lauretis has termed an 'undomesticat[ion]' of the female body.¹³⁵ A polite and vulnerable girlhood is transformed into a sensuous and independent womanhood, by being led away from domestic and policed spaces representative of rigid societal norms (like home and school) toward heterotopian spaces 'outside' of society (bars, brothels, pirate ships). This movement also communicates these girls' various shedding of the forms of socialization that demand acquiescent femininity, instead finding self-realization specifically apart from cultural codes and social mores—embracing unlawful behaviour, sexual excess and creative abandon. A similar narrative trajectory comes to define the work of Kathy Acker, whose novels and short stories show most clearly the lineage between the stylistic heterogeneity of early postmodernism and the postmodernism of the '70s and '80s. These stories often focus on girlhood, adopting a naïve child's voice to defamiliarize the ways in which a 'passive' womanhood is inscribed into young girls, and vice versa, inasmuch as older women are infantilized by a masculine urge to simultaneously 'protect' and exploit. This performative 'child-drag', as Acker calls it, shows perhaps more appreciation for the gendered implications of the literary child than any author associated with postmodernism; Acker's predominant use of orphans, 'gang[s] of pickpockets', boarding schools, and other literary tropes of the nineteenth-century, for instance, lays bare the extent to which the victimized Victorian child leans inordinately on young girls.¹³⁶ At the start of *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula*, a young Victorian girl's narration of her 'happy' childhood is undercut with references to the ways in which her family 'ignore[s] her' and send her to a 'Female Seminary in Troy' to learn to be an 'obedient child'.¹³⁷ Later in the collection, another nineteenth-century reminiscence of a girl's 'miserable childhood' starts with the revelation that her mother was advised to get pregnant by a 'quack doctor' to cure a bout of appendicitis, after

¹³⁴ Ducornet, *Stain*, p.31.

¹³⁵ Teresa de Lauretis, 'Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation', *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No.2 (May 1968), pp.155-177 (p.165).

¹³⁶ Acker, *Childlike Life*, pp.67, 25. For a gendered critique of the Victorian child see Catherine Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girl of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹³⁷ Acker, *Childlike Life*, pp.3-7.

which the girl's 'father left when she was three months pregnant'.¹³⁸ In her rewriting of *Great Expectations*, the trauma of Pip's dead parents is dissipated into a medley of disparate and conflicting anecdotes of childhood suffering; the narrator avers that her 'mother is the person [she loves] most', and then that '[her] mother's a bitch', her father is 'lying in the hospital cause he's on his third heart attack', and later a man who 'walked out on [her mother] when he found out she was pregnant'.¹³⁹

In part, Acker here reinforces the familiar role of institutions and parents in the lives of young girls, and indeed resembles Alther and Jong in positing the differing roles of mother and father in their 'condition[ing]'.¹⁴⁰ Acker's fathers are mostly defined by absence (the biological fathers of her children are usually said to have left during pregnancy) or forms of abuse rooted in the language of molestation (step-fathers want both to 'condition' and to 'fuck [their daughters]').¹⁴¹ Mothers, on the other hand, are again present to voice dated conceptions of femininity by which they have themselves been victimized; having become accidentally pregnant, they want to 'make [their children] exactly like [themselves]', commonly voicing concern over their daughters' artistic interests, unkempt appearance and sexual appetite.¹⁴² Yet these pressures diffuse in Acker's work into a more general 'Everything [...] monster' from which her young girls 'want to run away'.¹⁴³ Moreso than Jong, Acker finds the very logic of the bildungsroman to be faulty since the notion of a coherent, bounded identity seems culturally contingent to begin with; her proliferation of first-person narrators, which often interchange names and genders at will, tests the artificial unity of a single 'I'. Acker thereby anticipates Luce Irigaray's critique of the implicitly male 'philosophical subject', to which women must appear as a valorized 'other' that 'is not one, nor [...] singular', but frames this critique of subjectivity within a broader poststructuralist anxiety about the textual basis of the world.¹⁴⁴ Her intertextuality emphasises that without access to a female language (essentially, Cixous' *écriture féminine*), young girls' encounters with womanhood in terms set by men will leave them forever alienated.¹⁴⁵ In *Blood*

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp.63-4.

¹³⁹ Kathy Acker, *Great Expectations* (St Ives: Penguin, 2018), pp.8, 10, 53.

¹⁴⁰ See Acker, *Childlike Life*, pp.43, 81.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp.23, 24, 43. See also Acker, *Great Expectations*, pp.53-56; and Kathy Acker, *Blood and Guts in High School* (St Ives: Penguin, 2017), pp.7-8.

¹⁴² Acker, *Childlike Life*, p.81; *Great Expectations*, pp.53-56.

¹⁴³ Acker, *Great Expectations*, p.21.

¹⁴⁴ See Luce Irigaray, 'The Question of the Other', *Yale French Studies*, No. 87 (1995), pp.7-19. See also Katie R. Muth, 'Postmodern Fiction as Poststructuralist Theory: Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*', *Narrative*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2011), pp.868-110.

¹⁴⁵ See Helene Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. Keith and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer 1976), pp.875-893.

and Guts in High School, for example, young Janey's entrance into the 'slavery' of prostitution is accompanied by the need to write 'book reports' on Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, and to translate the love poetry of Sextus Propertius; as in *Fanny*'s collapsing of discursive and bodily violence, Janey's sexual encounters with both her father and her pimp, 'slave trader' are framed within a broader encounter with a male literary canon. Her response is to conduct a nonsensical re-writing of Propertius' 'pukey' Elegies:

Slave Trader first with his lousy me imprisoned eyes
Diseased by no before wants
Then my strong he threw down the drain individuality
And head forced into the dust LOVE's feet
Until me he had taught to be evil,
Him evil, and without to live plan.¹⁴⁶

Though the section reads like a Burroughsian cut-up, Janey here is conducting a rudimentary, word-for-word translation of the Latin without any regard for proper syntax or word order. Acker's use of the childish voice irreverently undercuts the seriousness of Propertius' love poetry, but also shows this act of linguistic violence to be a necessary stage on the way to finding Janey's artistic voice. As the section continues and Janey is more comfortably able to mould the Latin to fit her ends, her expletive-laden 'love poems' start to function less as ironic repudiations of the original poems' logic and more as genuine efforts to find her own poetic 'language'. This culminates in a series of poems that 'Janey wrote [...] by herself', in which the linguistic flow of the original poems collapses completely into a fragmented stream of consciousness, incorporating crude drawings and variant typography.¹⁴⁷

Acker evokes Foucault in her depiction of identity-making as less an act of personal discovery than a violence submitted from without—Janey 'do[esn't] know what or *who's* happening' to her at any one time (my emphasis).¹⁴⁸ Her attempt to take stock of her diffuse and irreducible 'identity' again centres upon the young girl's interest in the sexual; Janey admits that her 'body likes sex' but worries that this makes her 'an offender' like Hester, and feels that she instead 'must taste sweet'.¹⁴⁹ Clearly, her 'learning' is as much a case of textual 'unlearning' as anything else, and Acker here highlights again the discursive violence of patriarchy, through which the reification of the essential qualities of 'Woman' comes to circumscribe and delimit the

¹⁴⁶ Acker, *Blood and Guts*, p.101.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.105-116.

¹⁴⁸ Acker, *Blood and Guts*, p.106.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pp.107-9.

agency of real women. Though both Janey and Fanny ultimately find egress through artistic creation, the latter can only insert herself into a masculine tradition (even dressing up as a man to infiltrate an inner circle of male poets) whereas Acker seems to suggest that new forms of ‘feminine’ expression can only be achieved by an assault on language on its most basic levels of syntax and spelling. To this end, childish and infantile language proves a powerful tool for self-expression; in an effort to ‘redo [her]self’, her heroine at the end of *The Childish Life of the Black Tarantula* starts to ‘slobber down the right side fat white mouth goo goo goo’, whilst Janey’s poetic voice in *Blood and Guts in High School* is only discovered by passing from Propertius’ own through a phase of infantile execrations (‘puke/goo goo me/yumn/shitshit/shitface’).¹⁵⁰ As much as childish speech can be an acknowledgement of vulnerability or naïveté, then—Janey compares her father’s emotional vacillations to playing ‘eeny-meeny-miney-moe’ with her stuffed lamb—a child’s speech also seems the best way to purify language from its various processes of ‘conditioning’.¹⁵¹ Janey’s posthumous masterwork at the end of the novel, which narrates her quest for a secret book that will help ‘find [a] way out of all expectations’, suitably uses the austere style of a children’s picture book, complete with crude drawings of animals, maps, and hieroglyphs.¹⁵² Now Janey is able to ‘create this world in [her] own image’, and ‘dream of sex [...] of thieves, murderers, firebrands [...] of huge thighs opening’—again, to find not only a less repressed iteration of her social life but a place almost completely ‘outside society’ altogether.¹⁵³ Though by this time she has apparently died in an Alexandrian prison, her final epiphany foretells the birth of ‘many other Janey’s’ across the world, and, like Barth and Brautigan, it curls back in on the artistic creation of the novel itself: Janey’s final poem, ‘Blood and Guts in High School’, swears off the authority of ‘Parents teachers boyfriends’ for the pursuit of erotic self-realization.¹⁵⁴

Acker’s depiction of girlhood thereby seems only a more extreme example of the deconstructive urge that runs throughout this ‘feminist postmodernism’ more broadly. All of these writers acknowledge the extent to which women feel ‘lobotomized and robotized from birth’, variously ‘conditioned’ to adhere to conceptions of femininity centred around an emphasis on self-effacing politeness, sexless beauty, and an early acceptance of the importance of

¹⁵⁰ Acker, *Childlike Life*, p.87; *Blood and Guts*, p.106.

¹⁵¹ Acker, *Blood and Guts*, pp.9, 26.

¹⁵² Ibid., pp.141-165.

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp.163-4.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.165.

motherhood.¹⁵⁵ On top of the pressures of schools and parents (particularly mothers) these ideal conceptions of girlhood as proto-femininity diffuse into a larger ‘Structure’ of androcentric discourse, which is shown to reach even into children’s culture; in one comic section in *Kinflicks*, Ginny remembers first encountering sex in an educational Disney film ‘in which wicked Sammy Sperm had tried to corner luscious Ellie Ovum, the sweet farm girl newly arrived in the Big Womb’.¹⁵⁶ Once again, the child’s mind is figured as a particularly vulnerable mind to these acts of inscription, and both Jong and Acker variously compare the experience of young girls learning about girlhood from men to an act of sexual abuse. Aside from analogizing discursive violence as physical violence, this also simply acknowledges the extent to which discursive violence ultimately works upon bodies, as the young protagonists in these novels are denied autonomy on a bodily level—they are encouraged to feel shame about menstruation and sexual desire even as they cultivate their bodies to be sexually exploited by adult men. Whilst these depictions of underage sex thereby show a metatextual recognition of the child-as-victim in a similar way to Pynchon (and recapitulate Pynchon’s depiction of childhood innocence as an exploitable commodity), they also do more than Vonnegut or Pynchon to centre young girls as active and curious sexual agents. Even as a ten-year-old, Ginny is shown to be interested in games of spin-the-bottle and ‘Five Minutes in Heaven’, Ellen lusts after her teacher Sanctissima, and Acker’s Janey—who both sleeps with her father and mocks him that she will ‘sue [...] for child abuse’—enthusiastically doodles genitalia and sex acts.¹⁵⁷

Such a reaffirmation of girlhood sexuality widens into a broader challenge to the connotations of a polite and self-effacing girlhood. The ‘difficult child’ Ginny is compared to Lizzie Borden, and Charlotte escapes her convent to join a gang of drunken nomads; meanwhile, both Fanny and Acker’s girls find solace amid pirates and outlaws.¹⁵⁸ All of these novels thereby take on much of the character of a bildungsroman, in which the process of a young girl’s growth into maturity becomes a metaphor for the attainment of a genuine female subjectivity unburdened by bad faith. Whilst Acker is fairly extreme in her view that this must be ransomed by the complete dissolution of an androcentric language, the deconstructive manoeuvres shown in these novels show a broader realization of Cixous’ claim that a feminist subjectivity must probe ‘the mystifying charms of fiction [...] where woman has never her turn to speak’, and

¹⁵⁵ Acker, *Childlike Life*, p.58.

¹⁵⁶ Alther, *Kinflicks*, p.68.

¹⁵⁷ Acker, *Blood and Guts*, p.31.

¹⁵⁸ Lisa Alther, *Kinflicks*, p.89; for Acker’s use of ‘pirate’ and ‘outlaw’ figures, see Lee Konstantinou, ‘Punk’s Positive Dystopia’, in *Cool Characters: Irony and American Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

formulate a new *écriture féminine* that can ‘serve as a springboard for subversive thought’.¹⁵⁹ Recalling much of the revolutionary character of the Animate Child, the acknowledgement of young girls’ exclusion is thereby imbued with a dissident urge to ‘[transform] social and cultural structures’, albeit refocused from large-scale political change to a ‘politics of the personal’ consonant with the logic of second-wave feminism in general.¹⁶⁰ It also often comes with a postmodernist focus on humour and irony, which should not be underestimated; as Fanny’s encounter with Alexander Pope reminds us, the ironic gaze is a powerful one, which suggests an amount of epistemological authority in the ‘mockers’ in contrast to the ‘mocked’.¹⁶¹ Recalibrating this ironic gaze back upon the male logic of comedy seems one of the clearest ways in which these novels try to find a new ‘female’ language of humour, which simultaneously asserts the potential for the ‘feminine’ to be mischievous, irreverent, and bawdy.¹⁶² As with much early postmodernism, this constantly refracting irony mocks the affixation of ‘serious’ knowledge, but also suggests the implicitly ethical imperative in doing so—the resistance to ‘adult’ tradition or knowledge needn’t be simply a form of iconoclastic humour, but brings to light the limits to how these canons of knowledge are shaped, and how people are shaped along with them.

‘All those Peripheral Little Girls’: Toni Cade Bambara and Toni Morrison

The use of children to register incredulity toward totalizing narratives and ‘myths’ of identity is seen elsewhere in texts of ‘70s and ‘80s postmodernism, which keep a more sustained focus on various intersections of identity beyond gender. It must be said that the aforementioned ‘feminist postmodernism’ comes with many of the attendant problems of second-wave feminism more broadly; in the same way that the women’s liberation movement of the ‘60s and ‘70s can be seen to have lacked ‘knowledge of or concern for the problems of lower class and poor women or [...] non-white women from all classes’, the work of writers like Acker, Harris and Jong does often overlook race and class in their depiction of patriarchy.¹⁶³ Indeed, their depiction of young

¹⁵⁹ Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, p.879; and Acker, *Blood and Guts*, pp.125-6.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ See in particular Linda Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁶² The same goes for the ironic dynamics of metatextuality, which often seems male-centred; as Jeanette Winterson notes, ‘when women include themselves as a character in their own work, the work is read as autobiography. When men do it [...] it is read as metafiction’. Jeanette Winterson, ‘Introduction’, in Amy Scholder and Dennis Cooper (eds.), *Essential Acker: The Selected Writings of Kathy Acker* (New York: Grove Press, 2002), pp.i-xi (p.vii).

¹⁶³ bell hooks, *Ain’t I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), p.188. It is this predominantly white focus that has also led to the field of ‘black girlhood studies’ as its own object of enquiry: see Aria S. Halliday (ed.), *The Black Girlhood Studies Collection* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 2019).

girls fleeing from 'polite' and 'respectable' society very much rests upon their privilege; the acknowledgement of class comes only to provide their socially insulated girls with a space to escape into a (fairly cartoonish) space of lawlessness and bohemian poverty. The fight for feminine subjectivity remains primarily discursive, consonant with a postmodernist insistence on the primacy of language, but oftentimes ignorant of the facts of physical violence and material poverty, or at least unclear as to how these intersect with cultural oppression and marginalization. One of the clearest instances of this trend can be seen in Acker's constant use of the term 'slavery' to intimate the discursive control of a male-centred literary canon (and literary language more broadly), which is primarily employed to describe the mental state of white girls born into high society. The term is deployed far less easily in the work of authors with a greater appreciation for the implications of a racialized American society, and the historical trauma of the Atlantic slave trade; here, depictions of the discursive violence enacted upon young girls are accompanied by a recognition of other child-voices that have been 'left out' in the American canon, and of the material and historical circumstances upon which much of this violence rests.

Such a focus on what Toni Morrison called 'peripheral little girls' comes to define the fiction of Morrison and Toni Cade Bambara, who similarly engage with the ways in which literary depictions of children encourage a myth of childhood homogeneity.¹⁶⁴ Like Pynchon, both thereby mount a challenge to those totalizing cultural narratives which would define a wholly intact, universal 'child', or at least perpetuate a set of cultural 'myths' about what children are, what they do, and how they grow. In both, this predominantly takes the form of an interest in African American children, particularly in working-class or poverty-stricken families, and both are especially keen to the elision of these children in canonical American fiction. This implicitly forms part of Morrison's interest in the elision of blackness in the American literary canon more broadly, and a tendency to focus on 'the figure of the outcast, the exile, the preterite' in her texts, as Marc C. Connors notes.¹⁶⁵ Morrison and Bambara's attempts to re-centre these voices, often underlain with a deconstructive engagement with the American canon, form both a new strain of intertextuality familiar from other iterations of postmodernism, and continue a long history of

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in John N. Duvall, *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p.31.

¹⁶⁵ see Toni Morrison, 'Unspeakable Words Unspoken', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp.1-34; and Marc C. Connor, 'Modernity and the Homeless: Toni Morrison and the Fictions of Modernism', in Adrienne Lanier Seward and Justine Tally (eds.), *Toni Morrison: Memory and Meaning* (University of Mississippi Press), pp.19-32. David Mikics also connects Morrison with Pynchon's notion of the Preterite; see Mikics, 'Postmodern Fictions', in Josephine G. Hendin (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Postwar American Literature and Culture* ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp.187-209 (pp.199-200).

ironizing or transforming ‘traditional’ forms by African American writers like Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, Nora Zeale Hurston, and Ralph Ellison. Particularly in conjunction with an implicit focus on the intersections of discourse and power, Morrison and Bambara’s texts can thereby be seen to evince a vision of ‘postmodern blackness’, in the words of bell hooks, emphasizing ‘heterogeneity, the decentred subject’ and ‘the recognition of Otherness’ whilst keeping the theoretical ‘politics of difference’ relevant to the material ‘politics of racism’.¹⁶⁶

This is an important distinction that has often been invoked to account for the tension between accounts of postmodernism as a social theory, and the civil rights movement in the USA.¹⁶⁷ As I have laid out in my introduction, attempts to formulate a ‘black postmodernism’ have been criticized on the basis that the term abstracts the experience of racism within a more general ‘postmodern condition’, and because narrative techniques similar to postmodernism (or what Lubiano has called ‘black vernacular Signifying’) may be deployed with markedly different aims and contextual framings.¹⁶⁸ The tension between theories of postmodernism and race perhaps accounts for the overwhelmingly white authorship invoked in most studies of literary postmodernism, even when these studies ‘are launched in the name of racial difference’, as Madhu Dubey notes.¹⁶⁹ Whilst the compartmentalization of black and minority authorship in scholarship on literary postmodernism does seem to acknowledge the difficulty in collapsing authors into a homogenous vision of ‘postmodernism’, I agree with critics like Lubiano, Dubey, and Platt and Upstone that an engagement with texts outside of a ‘roll call of white male novelists’ can save literary postmodernism from becoming ‘profoundly conservative’ in its (lack of) engagement with race.¹⁷⁰ Thinking of these texts’ postmodernism as an attempt at a ‘deconstruction of racial hierarchies’ (or at least an interrogation of how these hierarchies are legitimated through language and metanarrative), texts like those of Morrison and Bambara are

¹⁶⁶ bell hooks, ‘postmodern blackness’, in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), pp.23-32.

¹⁶⁷ As well as hooks’ ‘postmodern blackness’, see Madhu Dubey, ‘Contemporary African American Fiction and the Politics of Postmodernism’, *Novel*, Vol. 35, No.2-3 (Spring-Summer 2002), pp.151-168.

¹⁶⁸ Wahneema Lubiano, ‘The Postmodernist Rag: Political Identity and the Vernacular in *Song of Solomon*’, in Valerie Smith (ed.), *New Essays on Song of Solomon*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.93-116 (p.95). See also Daryl B. Harris, ‘Postmodernist Diversions in African American Thought’, *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (November 2005), pp.209-228; and Phillip Brian Harper, *Framing the Margins: The Social Logic of Postmodern Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁶⁹ Madhu Dubey, *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p.3.

¹⁷⁰ Len Platt and Sara Upstone, ‘Introduction’, in Platt and Upstone (eds.) *Postmodern Literature & Race*, pp.1-11 (p.3); Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *The Anxiety of Obsolescence: The American Novel in the Age of Television* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006), p.206.

postmodernist in Linda Hutcheon's sense of the term, since they 'force reconsiderations of cultural specificity, the canon, and methods of analysis', forming a 'multiplicity of responses to a commonly perceived situation of marginality and ex-centricity'.¹⁷¹ This postmodernism overlaps with the theories of Foucault or Lyotard, and indeed the literary workings of Pynchon or Acker, but it should be acknowledged that their treatment of American culture also bear important differences, and has a longer prehistory in African American literature than the term 'postmodernism' would suggest.¹⁷²

Particularly given the use of children, these writers' interrogation of American culture seems a key project in a nation that has been 'imaginatively created and sustained through the logic of racial hierarchy', in the words of Caroline Levander.¹⁷³ Levander has written extensively about the centrality of the child to America's sense of racial identity and both Robin Bernstein and Dorothy Roberts have similarly emphasized how the conceptualization of childhood innocence is clearly 'raced white'.¹⁷⁴ Just as we might note that most of the angelic child-victims of the nineteenth century are girls (reifying troubling notions of passive femininity), we should also account for their whiteness, by which, for instance, 'the white angel' Little Eva figures as a polite, socialized and sympathetic foil to the slave child Topsy, who seems less 'cute' than 'odd and goblin-like', and marvels 'with astonishment at the wonders' of her white slave master's quarters.¹⁷⁵ Fictions of the child are again seen to perpetuate the values of a dominant culture, which invokes the mythic 'universality' of childhood experience to elide the variously raced implications of its performance of childishness, and protect a set of normatively white supremacist values passed from one generation to the next. Here, the child is once more seen to be a valuable tool in reifying and perpetuating ideology, and both Wilma King and Lucia Hodgson have written extensively on the centrality of the child to the history of racial violence in the United States. It was through children that slave status was inherited, and racial purity laws were upheld, for instance; more recently, Tera Ave Agyepong has emphasized that fears of

¹⁷¹ Len Platt and Sara Upstone, 'Introduction', in Len Platt and Sara Upstone (eds.) *Postmodern Literature & Race*, p.3; Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p.62.

¹⁷² As I have noted in my introduction, these texts' 'postmodernist' emphasis upon discursive violence rephrases theories advanced by W.E.B. DuBois, Langston Hughes and Franz Fanon long before Foucault or Lyotard.

¹⁷³ Caroline Levander, *Cradle of Liberty: Race, the Child, and National Belonging from Thomas Jefferson to W.E.B. DuBois* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2006), pp.4-5.

¹⁷⁴ Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2011), pp.4-5. See also Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage, 1997).

¹⁷⁵ Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, p.4; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp.309-10.

juvenile delinquency and criminality focus inordinately on black children, having a direct effect on the disproportionate imprisonment of African American youth in the modern U.S.A.¹⁷⁶

As postmodernism moves into the '70s and '80s, in which political battles were often fought along the lines of family values and child welfare, the extent to which 'the needs of imagined children [trump] even those of embodied children' is again stark.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, Morrison and Bambara show more sense of the material realities of these 'embodied children' that perhaps any author mentioned thusfar; instead of Pynchonian pastiche or Ackerian cut-up, Morrison and Bambara's styles show more fidelity to literary realism, affirming the complex interiority of psychologically 'round' characters, even if the intertextual irruptions of magic and miracle may be better termed 'magical realism',¹⁷⁸ and their use of slang and dialect features might be better understood by reference to Lubiano's 'black vernacular signifying'.¹⁷⁹ This helps to ground their trials in the everyday, and acknowledges the hardships experienced by real families; though the discursive might have a fundamental role to play, empirical studies have shown that 'the level of concentrated poverty experienced by African American children is greater than that for White and Latino children', and African American children are overrepresented in both juvenile detention facilities and the child welfare system.¹⁸⁰ It is with knowledge of such facts that both authors show the universal 'child' to be dangerous not only in its aggressive normativity (imposing views about the centrality of the nuclear family and the proper behaviour of children) but in its obscuring of the fact that the lives of real children are 'political and diverse', and touched by the same economic hardships as their parents.¹⁸¹ More than any other authors

¹⁷⁶ See Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011); and Lucia Hodgson, 'Childhood of the Race: A Critical Race Theory Intervention into Childhood Studies' in Anna Mae Duane (ed.), *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), pp.38-51.

¹⁷⁷ Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, p.2.

¹⁷⁸ See, for instance, Channette Romero, *Activism and the American Novel: Religion and Resistance in Fiction by Women of Colour* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011); and Shannin Shroeder, *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas* (Westport and London: Praeger, 2003).

¹⁷⁹ See Wahneema Lubiano, 'The Postmodernist Rag: Political Identity and the Vernacular in Song of Solomon', in Valerie Smith (ed.), *New Essays on Song of Solomon*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.93-116 (p.95). For more on black 'signifying' in African American literature, see Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁸⁰ Iheoma U. Iruka, Stephanie M. Curenton and Tonia R. Durden, 'Chapter 1: Introduction', in Iruka, Curenton and Durden (eds.), *African American Children in Early Childhood Education* (Bingley: Emerald Publishing Ltd, 2017), pp.3-14 (p.5); see also Alan J. Dettlaff and Reiko Boyd, 'Racial Disproportionality and Disparities in the Child Welfare System: Why Do They Exist, and What Can Be Done to Address Them?', *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 692, No. 1 (Nov. 2020), pp. 253-274.

¹⁸¹ Anette Ruth Appell, 'The Prepolitical Child of Child-Centered Jurisprudence', in Anna Mae Duane (ed.), *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), pp.19-37.

mentioned thusfar, then, Morrison and Bambara show particular attention to the business of clothing, feeding and housing a child—it is upon these material circumstances that a child might be allowed to grow out of patterns of inherited prejudice.

Consonant with the focus on this inheritance in many postmodernist authors, the work of Toni Cade Bambara also alludes to generational strife via unruly children, particularly the ‘feisty girls’ that Elizabeth Muther has identified as a repeated image.¹⁸² Like Acker, Harris, and Jong, Bambara thereby invests girlhood with some of the images of mischievous animacy seen in the previous chapter, whilst admitting that the generational divides of the 1960s were not experienced equally by all. As a character remarks in ‘My Man Bovanne’, there was ‘no generation gap among Black people’—it was merely ‘white concept for a white phenomenon’; consonantly, there is a central tension in Bambara’s stories between children’s dislike for their elders’ values and their ability to express these rebellious urges in the same way as their white peers.¹⁸³ In the story ‘Gorilla, My Love’ a group of children vent their displeasure at a ‘churchy’ movie by ‘Yellin, booin, stompin’ and ‘flingin [...] popcorn’, but are quickly censured by a ‘matron’ who ‘do not play’; the narrator-child Hazel’s displeasure at being made to watch this ‘simple-ass picture’ is compounded by the news that her Uncle Jefferson has proposed to another girl, despite his promises that his niece was ‘the cutest thing that ever walked the earth’.¹⁸⁴ Bambara’s play of perspective, which relies on an ironic apprehension of the child’s naïveté, sharpens the stories’ sense of an ‘adult’ betrayal, particularly by the time Hazel is left at the story’s close ‘crying and crumpling down in the seat’ and wondering why ‘grownups [are always] playin change-up and turnin you round every which way so bad’.¹⁸⁵ Like much other postmodernism, this use of a ‘childish’ incredulity toward adult values yields a narrative ripe with insinuations that pass by the child’s consciousness. As Rochelle Spenser has noted, the central betrayal of Uncle Jefferson’s engagement is suggested to have deeper resonance than young Hazel realizes; the adoption of a more ‘respectable’ name than ‘Hunca Bubba’ not only distances him from his niece but his family at large, and Hazel’s frustration at being dictated to by adults

¹⁸² Elizabeth Muther, ‘Bambara’s Feisty Girls: Resistance Narratives in “Gorilla, My Love”’, *African American Review*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Autumn 2002), pp.447-459.

¹⁸³ Toni Cade Bambara, ‘My Man Bovanne’, in *Gorilla, My Love* (New York; Toronto: Vintage, 1992), pp.1-10 (p.6).

¹⁸⁴ Toni Cade Bambara, ‘Gorilla, My Love’, in *Gorilla My Love*, pp.11-32 (p.15).

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp.19-20.

implies a larger narrative in which 'black pride' submits to censor itself for 'the promises of integration'.¹⁸⁶

Whilst being mischievous enough to suggest the possibility of resisting black culture's erasure (or else its being subsumed into white culture), Bambara's protagonists still gesture to the racism that affects African American children from an early age. In 'Raymond's Run', the narrator acknowledges those children that 'have to earn [their] pocket money by hustling', providing a sharp contrast to the well-off white children who can afford the \$35 toys seen in 'The Lesson'; in the latter, which depicts a group of black children visiting an FAO Schwarz store for the first time, the titular lesson is the very apprehension of inequality.¹⁸⁷ Again, the child's perspective defamiliarizes the story's depiction of racial difference, and a reader is invited to join in the 'lessons' variously learned or missed by the children:

Then Sugar surprises me by sayin, "You know, Miss Moore, I don't think all of us here put together eat in a year what that [toy] sailboat costs. [...] I think," say Sugar pushing me off her feet like she never done before, cause I whip her ass in a minute, "that this is not much of a democracy if you ask me. Equal chance to pursue happiness means an equal crack at the dough, don't it?"¹⁸⁸

As in much of Bambara's work, the ignorance of the narrator-child is contrasted to the implicit racism depicted, and the irreverence of the young girl's narration keeps the tone from becoming moralizing. Sugar's above epiphany is not centred as the story's central didactic thrust, but obscured by Sylvia's lack of attention, who refuses to admit or acknowledge that she might have 'learn[t] anything' by the episode. Like the young girls of 'Gorilla, My Love' and 'Raymond's Run', the child instead places emphasis on her own physical and mental prowess ('ain't nobody gonna beat me at nuthin'), and the naïve hopes that this will override the structural inequalities into which she is growing.¹⁸⁹ Yet even a love of sport and games, another trait of the Animate Child found in Bambara's children, is disturbed by racism; in 'The Hammer Man', Bambara shows a white police officer confiscate a basketball from a group of young black children, before beating and arresting one boy for protesting. A visceral illustration of the ethical failures of the 'adult' world, this scene of child-beating is still protected from becoming overly sentimentalized

¹⁸⁶ Rochelle Spencer, 'Toni Cade Bambara', in Yolanda Williams Page (ed.), *An Encyclopaedia of African American Women Writers*, vol. I (Westport; London: Greenwood Press), pp.28-34 (p.30).

¹⁸⁷ Toni Cade Bambara, 'Raymond's Run', in *Gorilla, My Love*, pp.21-32 (p.23).

¹⁸⁸ Toni Cade Bambara, 'The Lesson', in *Gorilla, My Love*, pp.85-96 (p.95).

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.96.

by the childish narration, which is at once impertinent and perceptive. Watching the ‘big cop [...] yelling at’ and then ‘pulling on’ the boy, the narrator is moved to question both the depiction of the police in popular fiction, and fictions of white childhood in general—she remarks that she ‘knew Dick and Jane was full of crap from the get-go’, referencing the popular series of basal readers by Zerna Sharp and William Gray.

In Morrison’s first two novels, we see a similar balance between presenting black childhood as a site of resistance, and one of oppression. Claudia, Nel and Sula in *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Sula* (1973) all show a struggle against fictions of passive or ‘cute’ girliness; Sula and Nel are invested with ‘mean determination to explore everything that interested them’ (including the sexual), whilst Claudia destroys the white dolls and Shirley Temple memorabilia her parents insist on buying her.¹⁹⁰ Yet in Temple we find again a powerful image of normalizing ‘childishness’, not only in terms of the gendered implications of the ‘ideal child’, but its implicit whiteness. It is in this vein that we see another reference to Sharp and Gray, in the literal ‘deconstruction’ of *Dick and Jane* that opens *The Bluest Eye*; Morrison’s pastiche of the series’ happy-go-lucky, childlike language (‘Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddoor...’) subsequently reappears at the head of each chapter, in seemingly random truncated excerpts.¹⁹¹ A characteristically postmodernist disassembly of language, these sections mirror the novel’s more general lack of chronology or continuity, but also show a desire to variously ‘re-write’ or ‘de-write’ fictions in a way similar to Burroughs and Acker. Morrison undermines the apparently ‘universal’ vision of childhood that takes place in an all-white, middle-class suburb, in a family with two parents and enough financial stability to indulge three children and keep multiple pets. Far from ideologically neutral or benign, such children’s fiction is shown to teach children like Pecola Breedlove that ‘all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every child treasured’, and that to be black was to be ‘relentlessly and aggressively ugly’.¹⁹²

In the figure of young Pecola, the young child is again seen as a particularly malleable mind to imprint upon with these values. Recalling the work of early postmodernists, Morrison’s childish narrator laments that ‘Adults do not talk to [children]’ but ‘issue orders’, and this adult

¹⁹⁰ Toni Morrison, *Sula* (London: Vintage, 1998), p.55; Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (London: Vintage, 1999), pp.19-20.

¹⁹¹ Morrison, *Bluest Eye*, pp.1-2.

¹⁹² Ibid., pp.18, 36.

world seems too far gone in their own ‘conditioning’ to question the wisdom of children’s culture.¹⁹³ In this case, an adult-curated children’s culture is shown to reify a normative whiteness, and much of the novel charts the young girl’s mental decline as her desire for blue eyes increases.¹⁹⁴ As with so much feminist postmodernism, discursive and bodily violence coalesce in the character of Pecola; we again witness a scene in which the ill-informed young girl thinks that ‘she is going to die’ whilst menstruating for the first time, and her hatred of her own body is guaranteed by another act of father-daughter child rape.¹⁹⁵ Unlike Nel and Sula, who delight in the stares of older men, Pecola cannot keep her sexual agency intact in her incestuous encounter with Cholly, but Morrison also seems insistent upon protecting her from becoming a token of mawkish suffering. The author later referred to her use of multiple narrators and a non-chronological structure as an attempt to ‘break the narrative into parts that had to be reassembled by the reader’, to avoid ‘lead[ing] the comfort of pitying [the young girl] rather than into an interrogation of themselves’.¹⁹⁶ Though she would ultimately deem that she had not succeeded, Morrison voices perhaps the clearest description of how the framing of child suffering coincides with postmodernist narrative techniques; in tending to discontinuity and multiplicity, Morrison keeps from overly sentimentalizing the victim-child, and frames this act of child abuse within disparate networks of abuse in which a reader is themselves complicit. These networks might act on both mind and body, but it should be acknowledged that Morrison shows far more attentiveness than writers like Acker or Jong to the material considerations that bolster cultural difference. In addition to feeling herself ‘left out’ from the idealized childhood embodied by ‘white baby dolls’ and Shirley Temple, Pecola’s young life is defined by poverty and domestic violence between her father Cholly (a ‘renting black’ whose lack of money ultimately leaves her homeless) and disabled mother; meanwhile, as a child she witnesses her parents ‘[fight] each other with a darkly brutal formalism’, a violence which ultimately spills over into Cholly’s sexual abuse of his daughter.¹⁹⁷ Whilst this sexual abuse once again finds the ‘child’ as vulnerable to physical and discursive oppression, Morrison’s acknowledgement of the abuse endured by Cholly presents the character less as a faceless ‘adult’ agent of oppression, but a complex and even sympathetic character representative of a wider chain of suffering.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p.8.

¹⁹⁴ For theories of ‘desirabilizing whiteness’ in child studies, see Sharon I. Radd and Tanetha Jamay Grosland, ‘Desirabilizing Whiteness: A Discursive Practice in Social Justice Leadership that Entrenches White Supremacy,’ *Urban Education*, Vol. 54, No.5, (2019), pp.656–676.

¹⁹⁵ Morrison, *Bluest Eye*, pp.26, 159–61. For more on Morrison’s depictions of rape and of the feminist dynamics of ‘rape narratives’ in general, see Sorchá Gunne and Zoë Brigley Thompson (eds.), *Feminism, Literature and Rape Narratives: Violence and Violation* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010).

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p.x.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., pp.20, 33, 41.

This wider chain of suffering, seen particularly in the portrayal of adults beset by childhood trauma, is a repeated theme in Morrison's canon. As well as the abuse of Pecola, the accidental death of Chicken Little creates a rift between the two child protagonists in *Sula*, Macon and Pilate Dead witness their father's murder as children in *Song of Solomon* (1977), and *Tar Baby*'s (1981) Michael is revealed to have been physically abused by his mother whilst an infant.¹⁹⁸ In *The Bluest Eye*, Pauline and Cholly Breedlove are seen to share their daughter's belief that they are 'ugly', and much of their restless violence is linked to their own experiences of childhood suffering. Pauline's lingering foot injury is revealed to stem from an accident with a nail in early youth, whilst Cholly is said to have been abandoned by his mother 'on a junk heap near a railroad'; the 'feelings of separateness and unworthiness' with which they subsequently grow up are ultimately projected onto their child, whom Pauline thinks 'smart' but 'ugly', especially compared to the well-to-do white children for whom she nannies.¹⁹⁹ Like Vonnegut and Heller, then, the suffering of children in Morrison's work spreads backwards through a 'lousy chain of inherited habit', and outwards from single characters into a larger network that implicates the culture as a whole. Whereas earlier authors use these connexions to attest to the ubiquity and inevitability of suffering, however, Morrison turns a more precise eye to how alterity is formed and bolstered by a deleterious 'adult' culture. Just as Pecola inherits the suffering of her parents', Geraldine's son in *The Bluest Eye* reacts to his emotionally bereft childhood by bullying Pecola, and Irish immigrant children in *Sula* bully their black peers to countermand their own ostracization from the white Protestant community. In such examples, the child is seen both as a particularly pitiable figure of this abuse, and an impressionable mind upon which the 'inherited habit' of abuse can imprint itself, especially since, like Bambara, Morrison's children are often naïvely ignorant of its racist implications. Recalling the novel's parody of *Dick and Jane*, Pecola's wish for 'Alice-and-Jerry-blue-storybook-eyes' in the third chapter is related with uncomfortably childish language, and her eventual 'deal' for these blue eyes rests upon her gullibility.²⁰⁰ This final 'attainment' of whiteness, bestowed by a pitying faith healer who essentially tricks the child, shows the final effects of the girl's false consciousness as a kind of mental disintegration not unlike the fragmentary passages of *Dick and Jane*. As Rita Simpson notes, the steady collapse of these narratives thereby not only undermine their claim to good

¹⁹⁸ Morrison's depiction of childhood trauma will be treated further in my fourth chapter.

¹⁹⁹ Morrison, *Bluest Eye*, pp.109, 125, 131.

²⁰⁰ Morrison, *Bluest Eye*, p.44.

sense, but also show the ‘chaotic psychological experience of seeing [her] self through the eyes of White society’.²⁰¹

In Toni Morrison’s work, then, childhood seems less a time of privileged innocence or formative growth than the start of a formative decline, in which the roots of trauma guarantee feelings of self-doubt that last well into adulthood. Much of Morrison’s canon thereby takes on the shape of a bildungsroman, albeit in a similar ironic inversion to Acker’s frustrated novels of ‘education’; here, the typically ‘male protagonist who demonstrates “heroic” achievement by overcoming social and moral obstacles’ is exchanged for a collection of young ‘African American female protagonists who inevitably lose the struggle against the double oppression of gender and race’.²⁰² In part, Morrison does agree with Acker that identity-making is predominantly a violence imposed from without, and that the mythical ‘authenticity’ prized in the bildungsroman form is only accessible to a privileged ‘Elect’ who are not variously fragmented through prejudice on multiple sides. Yet in a simpler sense, her child protagonists’ inability to ‘grow out of’ this trauma is guaranteed by material circumstances too often elided from, or romanticized in, fictions of childhood. This comes to the fore in Morrison’s second novel *Sula*, which follows the divergent passages of two young African American girls, Sula Peace and Nel Wright, from early childhood to adulthood. Like Pecola, Sula’s youth is defined by poverty and familial dysfunction that stretches back at least two generations; both her mother and grandmother endured abusive relationships with their husbands, until her grandmother was ultimately left alone with ‘\$1.65, five eggs, three beets and no idea of what or how to feel’.²⁰³ The depiction of Eva’s trials in trying to raise children in poverty gives a stark recognition of the material contingencies upon which a happy and healthy childhood rests; this can be as simple as the lack of adequate food or toilet-training toilet facilities, seen in Eva’s attempts to forcibly extract a bowel constriction from her infant. Once again, the ‘abuse’ doled out by adults seems

²⁰¹ Rita Simpson, *Black Looks and Black Acts: The Language of Toni Morrison in The Bluest Eye and Beloved* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p.40.

²⁰² See Anne T. Salvatore, ‘Toni Morrison’s New Bildungsromane: Paired Characters and Antithetical Form in *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *Beloved*’, *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp.154-178; and Pamela Thurschwell, ‘Dead Boys and Adolescent Girls: Unjoining the Bildungsroman in Carson McCuller’s *The Member of the Wedding* and Toni Morrison’s *Sula*’, *English Studies in Canada*, Vol. 38, No. 3-4 (2012), pp.105-128.

²⁰³ Morrison, *Sula*, p.32.

less an acknowledgement of a corrupted 'adult' world than an acknowledgment that, as Eva later explains, a mother cannot be 'playin' with youngins with three beets to [her] name'.²⁰⁴

Whilst the 'adventuresomeness' of *Sula*'s child protagonists often renders them oblivious to these economic tribulations, Morrison also reveals a naïveté in the expectation that individual resistance can overcome the structural inequalities into which they are growing. Nel ultimately settles down into motherhood and even deeper poverty, whilst Sula leaves town to pursue a life of nomadic hedonism. The latter is thereby able to gain a college education, but returns to Bottom feeling an 'artist without an art form', alienated from the predominantly white friends she has made outside of Bottom.²⁰⁵ Equally, her 'movie star' clothes and varied sexual partners lead her to be ostracized from the Christian community inside of Bottom, and her adult life is defined predominantly by a decline into solipsism and depression.²⁰⁶ Like *The Bluest Eye*, in which Pecola's final attainment of 'blue eyes' is ransomed by mental collapse, the end of *Sula* does not show Morrison's characters having 'achieve[d] narrative authority' or 'discovered' their 'true' identity at all.²⁰⁷ Instead, Sula dies alone and miserable, and Nel's visit to her grave prompts regression rather than growth; remembering the time before Chicken Little's death, Nel is taken back to the time in which '[they] were girls together', before collapsing into a kind of linguistic spasm ('girlgirlgirl').²⁰⁸ These 'circles of sorrow' do frustrate the bildungsroman's expectation toward teleological development, but equally show the difficulty of making sense of the tragedy at the heart of the novel at all.²⁰⁹ Chicken Little's death frustrates interpretation, especially since it does not emphasise the culpability of the 'adult' in the same way as in many other postmodernist authors, and critics have struggled to account for its position in relation to the suffering of Sula and Nel. Jill Matus has talked of the child's death as the equivalent 'childhood that slips from Sula's grasp that day', and as a 'symbol of Sula's own childhood hurt and loss', but both seem to rest upon an idealized conception of childhood innocence that Morrison is at pains to interrogate.²¹⁰ After all, Sula is said to secretly 'enjoy' watching her mother burn to death, and Helene admits, for her own part, that it is possible to 'love' one's children without 'liking'

²⁰⁴ Ibid., pp.33-4, 69. The use of 'Eva' and 'Nel' also seems conspicuous given the resonances with 'Little Eva' and 'Little Nel', suggesting another intextual repudiation of the innocent child.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p.121.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p.90.

²⁰⁷ Salvatore, 'Morrison's New Bildungsromane', p.154.

²⁰⁸ Morrison, *Sula*, p.174.

²⁰⁹ Morrison, *Sula*, p.174.

²¹⁰ Jill Matus, *Toni Morrison* (Manchester and New York: University of Manchester Press, 1998), p.64.

them.²¹¹ Matus' suggestion could thus be tempered; the trauma of Chicken Little's death certainly corresponds to Sula and Nel's childhood tribulations, if only that it seems to confirm the guilt and shame the girls have always felt in being 'neither white nor male'.²¹² Thus Sula is finally led to believe after the accident that she fundamentally has 'no self [...], no centre, no speck around which to grow', and Nel submits to her mother's role of single mother—neither feel like they can 'grow' in the way that a bildungsroman implies.²¹³

We might say, then, that Morrison's use of the bildungsroman form represents an effort to recentre these childhoods without submitting them to a glib triumphalism that would obscure the 'fragmented cultural context' in which they are discovered.²¹⁴ This varied fragmentation frustrates the logic of the bildungsroman, since the 'child' is not seen to grow into the 'adult' so much as the 'adult' and 'childish' coalesce in single characters: abusive adults like Cholly Breedlove and Soaphead Church are rendered sympathetic by reference to their suffering in youth, young characters like Sula often show the same streak of callous cruelty reserved for the 'adult', and the many adults with childhood trauma move both backwards and forwards in time in reliving an endless 'circle of sorrow'. Moreover, this fragmented society frustrates the binary logic of preterition, and much has been written on *Sula* as a 'deconstruction of [...] dichotomous thinking'.²¹⁵ It is indeed hard in a study such as this to do justice to Morrison's nuanced depictions of social inequality; in her first two novels she emphasises the disparity between the MacTeers, who have a fairly settled family life, and the Breedloves, who live in a tiny apartment with minimal furnishings, a tension also felt between the strait-laced Wrights and free-living Peaces. Elsewhere, an infant Nel and her mother are humiliated for straying into the white carriage of a train, but the mixed-race Maureen in *The Bluest Eye* is rich and light-skinned enough to be befriended by white girls. Morrison's narratives of childhood are thereby seen to enact a typically postmodernist 'resistance to closure', but if they rightly refuse to simplify the violence of preterition to an encounter between white and Black culture (or to point to a clear teleology in general), this does not deny the roots of culpable oppression in history. Part of the importance of childhood trauma in Toni Morrison's canon comes from her recognition of the analogous

²¹¹ Morrison, *Sula*, pp.57, 78.

²¹² Ibid., p.52.

²¹³ Ibid., p.119.

²¹⁴ Salvatore, 'Morrison's New Bildungsroman', p.157.

²¹⁵ Pi-hua Ni, 'Body as Danger: Gender, Race and Body in Toni Morrison's *Sula*', *Ilha do Desterro: A Journal of English Language, Literatures in English and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (Jan 2015), pp.115-126; see also Rita A. Bergenholtz, 'Toni Morrison's *Sula*: A Satire on Binary Thinking', *African American Review*, Vol. 30, No.1 (1996), pp.88-98.

past trauma of slavery that the African American consciousness must subsequently carry; the unhappiness of Nel and Sula reaches back not only to their parents' meagre upbringing but all the way back to the roots of Bottom, a community settled on a piece of infertile land sold to a slave.

This historical lineage is seen perhaps most clearly in her celebrated 1987 novel *Beloved*, a neo-slave narrative based upon the story of Margaret Garner, who killed her young infant to protect it from plantation life. The central act of child-killing in the novel, which literally 'haunts' the mother for years afterwards, is again set within a network of intersecting childhood trauma; the dead infant speeds Sethe's sons away from home before the age of thirteen, and the intense loneliness of Sethe's remaining daughter recalls her mother's upbringing on a slave plantation, where she was raised by other children owned by slavers.²¹⁶ The pain of 'rememory[ing]' this trauma is ultimately embodied in *Beloved*'s literal 'return' from the dead, which comes to represent not only Sethe's past but the 'cultural trauma' of slavery in the African American consciousness more broadly.²¹⁷ The revenant of the dead child both regresses Sethe toward a state of infantile solipsism, but—in one of postmodernist literature's most affecting sections of writing—relives the horrors of the slave trade in an analepsis to a voyage on the Middle Passage.²¹⁸ Like *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye*, this remembrance provokes a kind of linguistic collapse; *Beloved*'s dream is less a coherent narrative than a stuttering montage of death and degradation, related in the present tense, since the lasting burden of slavery means that this trauma 'is always now'.²¹⁹ The collapse of the novel's language recognizes the anachronism of placing English into the mouths of African slaves, as well as simply signalling the inevitable failure of the multiple traumas at the heart of the novel to cohere into catharsis.²²⁰ As in *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison's postmodernist resistance to closure ultimately shows these 'circles of sorrow' to be ongoing; at the end of the novel, when dead child *Beloved* is once again left missing, Morrison brings us back to the act of child-killing that started the novel, and recalls the erasure of those 'sixty million and more' to whom the book is dedicated.

²¹⁶ See Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Vintage, 2016), pp.3, 34-7, 37.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.254.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.248-52.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.248.

²²⁰ For some more detailed perspectives on *Beloved*'s treatment of slavery, and of slave narratives more generally, see Angelyn Mitchell, *The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery, and Gender in Contemporary Black Women's Fiction* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Carl Plasa and Betty J. Ring (eds.), *The Discourse of Slavery* (Oxford: Routledge, 1993); and Bertram D. Ashe and Ilka Saal (eds.), *Slavery and the Post-Black Imagination* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020).

The collapse of the novel's narration into stream-of-consciousness, then, not only analogises mental deterioration but defamiliarizes a textually coherent narrative of 'history' into a piecemeal apprehension of the real 'past', an important distinction in the text's postmodern logic. *Beloved* has rightly been seen as a work of 'historiographic metafiction', in Linda Hutcheon terms, and Morrison's use of this form in conjunction with depictions of childhood trauma will be discussed further in my last chapter.²²¹ For now, we should note the cultural moment at which this text was written; the publication of *Beloved* in the '80s engages with both continuing mainstream feminism (the logic of which lead authors like Jong or Alther to debate the choice of whether to have a child) and conservative anxieties about rising divorce and familial dysfunction after the long Sixties.²²² Importantly, the novel attends to the fact that the seemingly bipolar logic of Second-Wave feminism and Republican 'family values' both betray a model of personal choice and responsibility that often seems relevant only to those with few socioeconomic exigencies outside of their control. Morrison's canon, by contrast, continually shows parenting to be at the ransom of material and historical circumstances that frustrate the attempt to centre parental neglect or care as the cause of children's suffering or thriving. Essentially, just as one might note that racist stereotypes of 'crack babies' and 'welfare queens' in the '70s and '80s used by Republicans seem to obscure the wider structural causes of material poverty in African American communities (such as the cuts to welfare provision and healthcare that Republicans themselves oversaw during these decades), Morrison invites us to appreciate the wider contexts that would cause child suffering, even going to so far as to depict Sethe's killing of Beloved as a mercy.²²³ It is with knowledge of these wider contexts that the form of the bildungsroman proves so inadequate for Morrison, since the young 'individual' striving to better themselves is seen to rely on a wider community of outside agents, and to be at the whims of inequalities ossified through time. The fragmentation of Morrison's narratives thereby undermines not only the teleological assumptions of child development, but also undermines the structure by which the 'vulnerable child' is temporally set in place by reference to a parent or family—shifts in chronology show suffering children to become suffering adults, and the young pregnancy of Helene shows that a character can easily be both at once.

²²¹ See Peggy Ochoa, 'Morrison's *Beloved*: Allegorically Othering "White" Christianity', *MELUS*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Summer, 1999), pp. 107-123; see also Kimberley Chabot Davis, "'Postmodern Blackness': Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the End of History', *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), pp.242-260.

²²² Morrison acknowledges the former explicitly in a later preface to the novel; see Morrison, *Beloved*, pp.x-xi.

²²³ See Holloway Sparks, 'Queens, Teens, and Model Mothers: Race, Gender, and the Discourse of Welfare Reform', in Joe Soss, Sanford F. Schram, and Richard C. Fording (eds.), *Race and the Politics of Welfare Reform* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), pp.171-195; Kathi L. H. Harp and Amanada M. Bunting, 'The Racialized Nature of Child Welfare Policies and the Social Control of Black Bodies', *Social Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer 2020), pp.258-281.

In this way, Morrison and Bambara's texts can be seen to undermine further a myth of childhood homogeneity. 'The child' is shown to hide a medley of culturally and historically situated 'children', and the privileged space of the 'childish' is undermined by reference to its permeability with the 'adult'; in their texts, this becomes less a broad gesture to those 'traditional values' passed on through generations (though both Morrison and Bambara do show alarm at the lessons children learn) but a recognition that childhood is not insulated from the socioeconomic pressures of working adults. The child is vulnerable specifically because it is just as much a part of 'The Structure' as adults, and a parent's treatment of a child cannot be understood outside of these pressures. It is telling that in the work of early postmodernists, in which the child is pictured as antithesis and antagonist to the concerns of the adult world, they are rarely encountered in the family; Morrison and Bambara instead return them to the concerns of the household, and acknowledge that 'the family' (itself a hegemonic and totalizing term) hides a medley of variant parent-child experiences. Their focus on African American families in the '70s and '80s (particularly families in poverty) speaks also to the social inequalities of the 1970s and the discourse of 'family values' that followed, and they undermine a normalizing conservative logic whereby a sudden personal abdication of responsibility is used to explain familial decline after the long Sixties—particularly pronounced since the logic of 'family values' so often used black families as its negligent foil.²²⁴ The answer is to, again, to apprehend the individual fragmentations in these communities within a wider historical and socio-political 'Structure', against which the claims of the individual can hardly make a scratch. The individualistic logic of the bildungsroman splinters into an apprehension of various communities and identities, chained to both past and present, and their attempts to find a language of authentic subjectivity. Though Morrison and Bambara's stories suggest the possibility for this self-identification, their rejection of a narrative of 'growth' (or any clear narrative trajectory of decline, for that matter) recognizes itself as part of an ongoing process.

Victimized, Indoctrinated, Passed Over: An Overview of the Preterite Child

Almost all the antecedents for narratives of the suffering child mentioned at the outset of this chapter bear overtly ethical aims. From medieval retellings of the Massacre of the Innocents to the Victorian social realist novel, the child is posited as a particularly vulnerable and pitiable

²²⁴ For more on 'family values' rhetoric and its intersection with race and gender, see Elaine Tyler May, "'Family Values'", and Gill Jagger and Caroline Wright (eds.), *Changing Family Values* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

victim with which to draw attention to the evils of the world; still today, charitable appeals for the victims of war, famine and poverty make heavy use of images of children to elicit donations.²²⁵ In a sense, the Preterite Child in postmodernist literature is no different, inasmuch it usually contains an implicitly ethical appeal against those ‘adult’ evils to which children are submitted. In Vonnegut, Heller, and Pynchon, these evils diffuse into a broad vision of Western modernity, in which many concerns of the nineteenth century are recapitulated—again we see violence, racism, the hegemony of reason, and the machinery of capitalism, albeit in an even more interconnected and entrenched form that leads many to wonder if exploitation is at the heart of the human condition itself. Pynchon sharpens this sense of the ‘Preterite’ away from such universalization toward an apprehension of privilege and oppression, both mourning the dead of a war enacted predominantly for ‘the business of [...] buying and selling’, and tracing the wider patterns of ‘submission and dominance’ by which the interests of a centred ‘Elect’ are sustained by the exploitation of others.²²⁶ Though the child-victim in *Gravity’s Rainbow* often seem a synecdoche for these broader patterns of suffering, Pynchon is also acutely aware that the child’s mind provides a key place where these ‘dominant’ ideologies can be reified and perpetuated, and the visceral bodily violence enacted upon children in his third novel is accompanied by the discursive violence of pedagogy, indoctrination, and propaganda. This becomes a key theme in subsequent works of postmodernism, in which this discursive-bodily violence draws on postmodern theories of knowledge-power, and the role of institutional practice, that were concurrently being ‘domesticat[ed]’ by American universities after the long Sixties.²²⁷

Pynchon’s other major contribution in the postmodernist understanding of the Preterite Child is a recognition that, as well as a valuable space in which to perpetuate ideology, the child provides a valuable sign with which it can be encoded. In Part Two of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Slothrop glances across a Spanish propaganda cartoon of politicians ‘bickering like a bunch of putative mothers’ over a ‘baby, with a label on its diaper [that] sez LA REVOLUCIÓN’; elsewhere, the term ‘children’ is utilised constantly in *V.* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* to refer to the Herero people

²²⁵ See Christopher Burt and K. Strongman, ‘Use of Images in Charity Advertising: Improving Donations and Compliance Rates’, *International Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, Vol. 8, No. 8 (2005), pp.571-80.

²²⁶ Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, p.124. Here Pynchon also echoes Vonnegut in his suspicion of pedagogy; the violence of the war serves only to provide ‘raw materials to be recorded into History, so that children may be taught History as sequences of violence, battle after battle, and be more prepared for the adult world’.

²²⁷ Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, p.180.

enslaved, and then annihilated, by German colonists in the early twentieth century.²²⁸ One feels that the identification of these characters with children works not so much as a means by which to inspire sympathy for their plight as to pinpoint how, as Henry Jenkins posits, the image of the child can '[carry] the rhetorical force of such arguments'.²²⁹ This extends even to the portrayal of the child-victim, which in *The Crying of Lot 49* becomes the saccharine climax of the 1930s film *Cashiered*, and we should note the prominence of the child-actor in Pynchon more generally.²³⁰ As well as once more showing alarm at children co-opted for adult gain, Pynchon here acknowledges the process by which the child becomes a 'pleasing image that adults need to sustain their own identities', in the words of Lynn Spigel.²³¹ These authors' metatextual play with the literary child, then, both helps replenish an image long since lapsed into cliché, and hints towards the ways in which these images of 'ideal' children often prove most harmful to real children. To adapt a phrase from Simone de Beauvoir, the idea of the child 'projects into a Platonic heaven [...] the dispersed, contingent, and multiple existence' of children, and feminist theory does indeed play an important role in picking apart some of the 'myths' of the child.²³² The intersection of youth and femininity makes young girls particularly vulnerable to being shaped by a patriarchal 'adult' tradition; girlhood is seen to provide a vital time in which rebellion can point the way toward an authentic subjectivity, before it is lost forever to the internalization of a motherly 'conditioning'. Consonant with the logic of Second-Wave feminism, this 'conditioning' shapes both minds and bodies, and the scenes of child rape in Acker in particular work hard to strike a balance between attesting to the violence of patriarchy and preserving the sexual agency of young girls.

If these authors weaken the conceptual integrity of 'the child'—particularly the gendered implications at the heart of images like Shirley Temple—Toni Morrison holds the fiction of the child to even more scrutiny. The centred image of white, middle-class childhood is seen to legitimate the marginalization of black girlhood, a discursive violence again analogised in the

²²⁸ Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, p.313; See also pp. 87, 343, 406, 427.

²²⁹ Henry Jenkins, 'Childhood Innocence and Other Myths', in *The Children's Culture Reader*, ed. Henry Jenkins (New York and London: New York University Press,), pp.1-37 (p.2). For more on paternalism and colonialism, see Michael N. Barnett (ed.), *Paternalism Beyond Borders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); and Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

²³⁰ See Pynchon, *Crying of Lot 49*, p.28.

²³¹ See Lynn Spigel, 'Seducing the Innocent: Childhood and Television in Postwar America', in *Ruthless Criticism: New Perspectives in U.S. Communication History*, ed. W.S. Solomon and R.W. McChesney (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp.259-90 (p.259).

²³² de Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, p.275.

bodily suffering of Pecola. Yet this bodily suffering is felt even more keenly in an author who depicts perhaps more clearly than any other the material exigencies of childrearing; though one character suggests at the end of *The Bluest Eye* that God simply ‘forgot about the children’, Morrison implies that preterition is grounded more in more worldly concerns.²³³ In this sense, her focus on the discursive ‘Othering’ by which her child characters fail to ‘grow’ into an authentic subjectivity is accompanied by a stark recognition of the difficulties of raising children who cannot even be fed or housed adequately. A postmodernist alarm at the infiltration of the ‘childish’ by the ‘adult’ is here extended to an acknowledge that real children are hardly separate from the world of capitalist exploitation and racist discrimination that affects their parents, by virtue of being raised in working families; child characters often inherit the poverty and trauma that besets their parents, and cannot help but pass it onto their children in turn. Morrison’s fiction shows a keen eye toward this lineage, which stretches back toward the historical trauma of slavery and colonial slaughter, and constantly erupts into an ever-shifting present. In showing the porous boundaries between past and present, between child and family, and between families and a larger socioeconomic ‘Structure’ of which they are a part, ‘the child’ diffuses into a broader network of suffering, apart from which it cannot hope to be understood.

We could say then, that throughout this chapter we have seen a fraying of the conceptual clarity of the ‘childish’, especially given its proximity to the variously ‘adult’ interests that act and imprint themselves upon children. The privileged autonomy of the Animate Child is lost, and the business of recovering it becomes less a question of social revolution (as was implicit in many early postmodernists) and more of a steady deconstruction of those myths that constitute ‘childishness’ in the first place. Post-Sixties, this leans on the very rise of postmodern theory that birthed child studies; indeed, these authors’ sense of the cultural and historical relativism of ‘the child’, and the intersections of identity that it elides, seem prescient given the direction of the discipline over the last thirty years.²³⁴ From this standpoint, the key ethical imperative of the Preterite Child is less to acknowledge the fact of child-suffering or abandonment than to interrogate patterns and structures by which this suffering is inflicted upon children, and how any fiction of childhood carries with it the normalizing power to elide childhood difference. This is most definitely an ethics of postmodernism, since it mirrors contemporary cultural theory in undermining the ‘hegemony of any single discursive system’ (which ‘would inevitably victimize

²³³ Morrison, *Bluest Eye*, p.179.

²³⁴ See Jens Qvortrup, ‘Varieties of Childhood’, in Jens Qvortrup (ed.), *Studies in Modern Childhood: Society, Agency, Culture*, (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), pp.1-20.

other discourses’) and offers us instead an ‘advocacy of difference, pluriformity, and multiplicity’ in its presentation of childhood.²³⁵ Moreover, authors’ continued use of postmodernist narrative techniques (albeit oftentimes in less ostentatious forms than early postmodernists) show a reluctance to foreground any value system or identity as a normative centre, or provide a clear didacticism or narrative closure that might compromise the play of interpretation. Like the last chapter, the key overlap between the childish and the postmodernist can be apprehended simply by viewing the presence of authors—Erica Jong and Toni Morrison, for instance—who went on to write books for children; here we see the specific aim of telling those stories that had been ‘left out’, with the re-centring those voices in an essential medium in which ideology is encoded for a younger generation.

On the other side of the discursive spectrum, their interest in children also betrays the influence of mainstream conservatism. Particularly moving into the 1980s, the presentation of familial decline keys into an obsession with the family which often used the vulnerable child—from abduction to ‘crack babies’ and ‘latchkey kids’—as its rhetorical centre.²³⁶ The political expediency of the Preterite Child not only attests to the ease of its co-optation as a fiction for adults, but also to its presentation of an aggressively normative image of American childhood by the beatification of white, middle-class suburban families with two heterosexual parents joined in Christian matrimony.²³⁷ By the end of the decade, this idea of the ‘traditional American family’, along with a series of moral panics about children and child abuse that accompanied a string of high-profile abductions, becomes a common thread in postmodernist literature, as will be seen in the next chapter.²³⁸ However, these have clearly reached such saturation as to be deployed only in peripheral or parodic contexts; DeLillo’s characters glance disinterestedly across images of missing children on milk cartons, whilst David Foster Wallace’s fiction brims with a darkly comic collection of children beset by a bizarre array of disabilities and deformities. Even in Richard Powers’ *Operation Wandering Soul* (1993), which is set within the children’s ward of an inner-city hospital, the jaded surgeon Kraft shows incredulity toward those ubiquitous images of

²³⁵ Bertens, *Idea of the Postmodern*, pp.7-8.

²³⁶ See Linda McKie, *Families, Violence and Social Change* (Maidenhead and New York: Open University Press, 2005), pp.19-20; Richard Beck, *We Believe the Children: A Moral Panic in the 1980s* (New York: Perseus, 2015); and Jason E. Glenn, ‘Making Crack Babies: Race Discourse and the Biologization of Behaviour’, in Laurie B. Green, John Mckiernan-Gonzalez, Martin Summers (eds.), *Contested Histories of Race and Health in North America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), pp.237-60.

²³⁷ See May, ‘Family Values’.

²³⁸ See Paul M. Renfro, *Stranger Danger: Family Values, Childhood, and the American Carceral State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

‘pasteurized, freckled, fairybook simperers’ that might distract from ‘real children—the pet mutilators, the medicine cabinet moles, the ones that refuse to pee until their bladders burst’.²³⁹ Whilst Powers’ interpolation of a multiplicity of stories of child suffering (from the Pied Piper to the familiar ‘Children’s Crusade’) sets these children’s tribulations within another ‘lousy chain of inherited habit’ stretching back through history, he also acknowledges that it becomes difficult to centre the child as innocent victim in an age of ‘incomprehensible slickie shirts, Slurpees, Nerf balls, Slime as a registered trademark, [and] robots that metamorphose into intergalactic defense depots’.²⁴⁰ The note of sympathy that has characterized most of this chapter is increasingly muddled by reference to this new culture of childhood; as will be seen, the child suddenly seems less an oppositional figure to, or an innocent victim of, a compromised ‘adult’ world, than one of the biggest beneficiaries of its excesses.

²³⁹ Richard Powers, *Operation Wandering Soul* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), p.191.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.32.

Chapter 3: The Prodigious Child

Over the last two chapters we have seen a steady convergence of the ‘adult’ and the ‘child’, both in the irruptive presence of the ‘childish’ in adult discourse, and in the depiction of this discourse embedding itself in children. Carrying on this trend, the next two chapters represent the point at which adults and children have become virtually indistinguishable, in the form of the precocious child and the childish adult. The ‘Prodigious Child’ is indeed precocious, touching on the term ‘child prodigy’ to denote a child of premature ‘adult’ intelligence, often referred to as a ‘gifted child’ or ‘genius child’. Yet the meaning of ‘prodigy’ (which migrated to English from the Latin ‘prodigium’) would have originally been closer to ‘portent’ or ‘monster’, and the childhood precocity in much later postmodernist literature does unsettle in its uncanny performance of adulthood.¹ Rather than insulated from or contrasted to the world of the ‘adult’, the Prodigious Child seems fully implicated in its workings, and in this chapter much of the simple ‘childishness’ of the former chapters is lost to an increasingly complex world of child culture. Such complexity touches upon a third meaning to the term ‘prodigious’; children represent less the absence of the ‘adult’ but an excessive abundance of it, unable to distinguish themselves from the pervasive and sprawling world of late capitalism.²

Literary Antecedents and Historical Contexts

Consonant with the original meaning of ‘prodigy’, the more monstrous antecedents of the Prodigious Child can be traced to the deeply ‘ambivalent view of childhood’ in medieval and early modern English literature.³ As much as the child could be an icon of untainted purity (in the late fourteenth-century poem *Pearl*, for instance), many theologians emphasized that children were brought into the world laden with original sin, and could only be redeemed with a proper baptism and the love of a discerning parent. The belief that every child was already ‘polluted with sin’ carries over to some of the earliest American literature, in which Puritanical pedagogues like Benjamin Wadsworth warned against indulging ‘Children of Wrath’, who were wont to be

¹ Jason Davies, *Rome’s Religious History: Livy, Tacitus and Ammianus on their Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.29.

² One of the inspirations for the term ‘prodigious’, and the overlapping senses of the term listed here, is Tom LeClair, ‘The Prodigious Fiction of Richard Powers, William Vollmann, and David Foster Wallace’, in *Critique*, 38, no. 1 (Fall 1996), pp.12-33.

³ Anna Czarnowus, *Inscription on the Body: Monstrous Children in Middle English Literature* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2009), p.10.

‘pursuing vanities, [and] provoking God by personal transgressions’.⁴ Though the severity of these older perspectives may seem alien to the ‘Child-Centred America’ of the later twentieth century, their influence can be seen in a more recent strain of monstrous childishness; critics like Ellen Pifer and Karen J. Renner have noted a tradition in literature and film of the ‘evil child’, which began to ‘proliferate with serious regularity in the 1950s’.⁵ Early examples like Ray Bradbury’s ‘The Small Assassin’ (1946) and William March’s *The Bad Seed* (1954) bear a debt to the Puritan assurance that children are inherently evil, but also echo Freudian suggestions that the child’s inner life may be a lot less innocent than expected. It is no coincidence that one of the first ‘evil child’ films in the 1960s (Jack Clayton’s *The Innocents*) was an adaptation of Henry James’ *Turn of the Screw* (1898), which has often been linked to Freudian psychology in its portrayal of the secretive and sinister Miles and Flora.⁶ James’ novella can be seen to influence much of the unsettling inscrutability of the child in horror films like *The Village of the Damned* (1960), *Rosemary’s Baby* (1967), and *The Exorcist* (1974), all of which make use of children corrupted by some paranormal or demonic influence.⁷ In the mind-reading abilities of the Midwich children, and the sexual advances of young Regan MacNeil, these films betray anxieties that the child may have access to ‘all that [adults] know—and heaven knows what else besides’, in the words of Miles’ terrified governess.⁸

This is not to say that the ‘child prodigy’ need only inspire fear or horror. Whilst extraordinary or ‘prodigious’ births in Classical mythology could be a sign of the Gods’ displeasure, they could also presage heroic exceptionality; indeed, Otto Rank and Lord Raglan’s mythic ‘hero’ patterns would later specify unusual parentage and birth as a sign of archetypal heroism.⁹ The extent to which such children are depicted mostly in terms of premature

⁴ See Allison Coudert, ‘Educating Girls in Early Modern Europe and America’, in Albrecht Classen (ed.), *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: The Results of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality* (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2005), pp.389-414 (p.393). See also David E. Stannard, ‘Death and the Puritan Child’, in *American Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No.5 (December 1974), pp.456-76.

⁵ Paula S. Fass, ‘The Child-Centered Family? New Rules in Postwar America’, in *Reinventing Childhood After World War II*, ed. Paula S. Fass and Michael Grossberg (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), pp.1-18 (pp.1-2); Karen J. Renner, ‘Evil Children in Film and Literature’, in Karen Renner (ed.), *The “Evil Child” in Literature, Film and Popular Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), pp.1-27 (pp.1-2); see also Ellen Pifer, *Demon or Doll: Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture* (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), pp.14-16; and Karen J. Renner, *The Evil Child in the Popular Imagination* (New York; Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

⁶ See Pifer, *Demon or Doll*, pp.22-5.

⁷ Renner, ‘Evil Children in Film and Literature’, pp.1-2.

⁸ Henry James, ‘The Turn of the Screw’, in T.J. Lustig (ed.) *The Turn of the Screw and Other Stories* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2008), pp.113-236 (p.156).

⁹ See Dean A. Miller, *The Epic Hero* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 2000).

adulthood has led scholars like Leah Marcus and Robert Pattison to note a distinct lack of ‘childishness’ in the work of Greek and Roman writers, who would ‘reserve praise for the *puer senex*’, or ‘aged child’.¹⁰ This sense recurs in studies of Shakespeare, many of which emphasize the precocity of his child characters; whilst perhaps seeming ‘prematurely adult’, Leah Marcus notes that the vogue for a humanist education at the time meant that upper-class children ‘often did reach a formidable level of accomplishment in relatively few years’.¹¹ Alongside the fictitious children of the Renaissance stage, real children were often enlisted to play adult roles, and Katie Knowles has noted points of comparison between the children’s acting troupes on the Early Modern Stage and the fervour for the child actor in the nineteenth century.¹² From Victorian troupes to ‘fairy stars’ in American vaudeville, ‘child prodigies’ on the stage would delight audiences with song and dance routines, in productions specifically geared to ‘showcase children who were unusually talented for their age’.¹³ Like Dickens’ Ninetta Crummles, a character who held a mirror to real-life ‘Infant Phenomena’ like Miss Mudie and Baby Benson, the Prodigious Child often bears familiar anxieties about such children stolen from the world of their peers and thrust into the world of adulthood; behind the exceptionality and industry of such ‘gifted children’ these authors show a bleak obverse of self-doubt, parental coercion, and isolation from the simple joys of youth.¹⁴

Such anxieties tessellate with the many voices in late-twentieth-century America who proclaimed children to be ‘growing up too fast, too soon’.¹⁵ Studies like Marie Winn’s *Children without Childhood* (1983) and Neil Postman’s *Disappearance of Childhood* (1983) place the blame squarely upon the ubiquity of television, which ‘makes public what has previously been private’,

¹⁰ See Reinhard Kuhn, *Corruption in Paradise: The Child in Western Literature* (Hanover; London: University Press of New England, 1982), pp.24-5; and Leah Marcus, *Childhood and Cultural Despair: A Theme and Variations in Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978), p.10.

¹¹ Marjorie Garber, *Coming of Age in Shakespeare* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p.30; Marcus, *Childhood and Cultural Despair*, p.7. See also Morriss Henry Partee, *Childhood in Shakespeare’s Plays* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

¹² See Katie Knowles, *Shakespeare’s Boys: A Cultural History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014); and Katie Knowles, ‘Drama’, in Anna French (ed.), *Early Modern Childhood: An Introduction* (New York and Oxford: Routledge), pp.237-60. Knowles’ upcoming project will specifically compare the presence of child-actors on the Early Modern and Victorian stages.

¹³ Marah Gubar, ‘The Drama of Precocity: Child Performers on the Victorian Stage’, in Dennis Denisoff (ed.) *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2008), pp.63-78 (p.68).

¹⁴ See Gubar, ‘The Drama of Precocity’, and Marah Gubar, *Artful Dodgers, Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children’s Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁵ See David Elkind, *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon* (New York: Hachette Books, 1988); Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1982); and Marie Winn, *Children without Childhood* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

with no ability to effectively ‘segregate its audience’ of adults and children.¹⁶ For Postman, this was raising a generation of children well-schooled in previously exclusive ‘worldly knowledge’, investing them with adult experience (especially that of money, sex, and violence) without context or perspective.¹⁷ In truth, the centrality of television to an American childhood could be more realistically traced to what Chudacoff terms the ‘commercialization and co-optation of child’s play’ in the mid-fifties, with the onset of child-targeted advertising and the mass production of plastic toys.¹⁸ Television’s ‘rapid expansion [...] as a cultural form’ had been facilitated by a prosperous postwar period in which the number of homes with a television rose from about 9 per cent in 1950 to nearer ninety in 1960;¹⁹ by the 1980s this had reached omnipresent proportions with the advent of cable television, which meant not only that there were more channels and shows dedicated to children, but more advertising possibilities to target children specifically.²⁰ This led to an increasingly dovetailing toy industry and children’s television industry, to the point where stories created for children were often conceived specifically with tie-in merchandise in mind. Stephen Kline points to shows like *Transformers* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* as evidence that ‘the “postmodern revolt” has become one with the official children’s culture of Western society’, citing both a blurring of ‘aesthetic and commodity production’, and the simple fact that the US toy market grew by ten billion dollars between the mid-seventies and mid-eighties.²¹ This children’s culture boom in the ‘80s and ‘90s also encompassed the creation and popularization of computer games and consoles, which also became cited by conservatives as a death-knell to American childhood; rather than the ‘simple’ outdoor games and play that characterized these commentators’ youth, the culture of a middle-class American childhood was increasingly bound to complex electronic technologies.²² Indeed,

¹⁶ Postman, *Disappearance of Childhood*, p.82. See also Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York and London: Penguin, 1986); and Marie Winn, *The Plug-in Drug: Television, Children and the Family* (New York: Viking Press, 1977).

¹⁷ Postman, *Disappearance of Childhood*, p.84.

¹⁸ Howard P. Chudacoff, *Children at Play: An American History* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), pp.99, 154.

¹⁹ Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.32.

²⁰ For an extensive account of the creation and growth of cable television, see Patrick Parsons, *Blue Skies: A History of Cable Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008). From the founding of Nickelodeon in 1979, the ‘80s and ‘90s saw the creation of several important child-focused channels and programming blocks, like the Disney Channel (1983), Nick Jr. (1988), Fox Kids (1990), and Cartoon Network (1993).

²¹ Stephen Kline, *Out of the Garden: Toys, TV, and Children’s Culture in the Age of Marketing* (London; New York: Verso, 1993), p.140.

²² See *ibid.*, pp.66-7. Kline notes that, ‘despite early hysteria about video-game play, none of these fears have been justified’ by academic research in the area. Certainly, most empirical studies about the links between video game consumption and violence, anxiety or depression has questioned the popular narrative that often links them; see Barrie Gunter, *The Effects of Video Games on Children: The Myth Unmasked* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Lawrence Kutner and Cheryl Olson, *Grand Theft Childhood: The Surprising Truth about Violent Video Games* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008); and Rachel Kowart and Thorsten Quandt (eds.), *The*

by the early years of the Internet, there is a sense that the young might be the best placed to understand and exploit these technologies, leaving many less tech-savvy adults behind.

As Kline's reference to the 'postmodern' should warn us, the term has by this time migrated from a literary movement in the Sixties, through a shift toward cultural theory hewn from French poststructuralism, to a fully-fledged historical moment in the later twentieth century. Accounts of postmodernity and the 'postmodern condition' by authors like Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard recall many 'postmodernist' elements of the last chapters (from the pastiche of 'exhausted fictions' to the 'death of the subject') but place them within a broader account of 'late capitalism', defined by the global flow of capital via multinational corporations, the 'hyperreality' created by the reproduction of images on television, and the convergence of both in overseeing the 'ever increasing penetration of capitalism into our day-to-day existence'.²³ As David Harvey has argued, this shift in the later twentieth century can be linked to the same 'crisis of overaccumulation' that catalysed the widening social divides seen in the last chapter, except now we see its more palatable obverse: sped by Reaganite neoliberalism, Harvey finds the economic logic of postmodernity within the 'world of real estate, finance, and business services', 'the cultural mass given over to the production of images [and] knowledge', and 'the emergence of the casino economy, with all of its [...] fictitious capital formation'.²⁴ All of this has a clear bearing upon the booming child culture industry of this period; it is obvious for instance that the diversification of children's TV networks, the deregulation and subsequent growth of children's toy advertising, and the convergence of both in designing shows with parallel merchandising, were facilitated by the 'market *über alles*' logic of the '80s and '90s.²⁵ In a wider sense, the provocative claim by Robert McChesney that this neoliberal logic ultimately produced 'shopping malls' rather than 'communities' deftly alludes to the sense that youth culture in America is increasingly oriented around opportunities for consumption, as has been emphasized by Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe Kincheloe.²⁶

Video Game Debate: Unravelling the Physical, Social and Psychological Effects of Digital Games (New York and London: Routledge, 2016).

²³ Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (Taylor and Francis, 1994), pp.9-10. See also Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1992), pp.15-16.

²⁴ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), pp.331-2.

²⁵ See Stephen Kline, *Out of the Garden*, pp.214-15.

²⁶ Robert McChesney, 'Introduction', in Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998), pp.7-16 (p.11). See also Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe Kincheloe, *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).

In contrast to the last two chapters, which tend to depict children in the act of communal play without expensive toys or games, the *Prodigious Child* shows children at their most acquisitive, and at their most alone. Electronic technologies and consumer society (facets of a postmodern childhood conspicuous by their absence thusfar) also take a central role; whilst this testifies to the waning influence of outdoor games amid opportunities for solitary watching or videogaming, children also prove a microcosm of a wider ‘atomisation of contemporary institutions and subjectivities’ encouraging capitalist accumulation.²⁷ Consonant with the broadly chronological nature of the last two chapters, most of these works can be found in a period stretching from the mid-‘80s to the late ‘90s, when the logic of ‘postmodernism’ has diffused into a mainstream of television sitcoms, advertisements, and political campaigning.²⁸ Given that these authors’ account of ‘postmodern America’ is often satirical and seldom sympathetic, many of these ‘late postmodernists’ do hold a particularly uncertain status within the canon, reinforced by the fact that many of them (the first generation to recognize a ‘postmodernist’ literature) variously disavowed the term.²⁹ David Foster Wallace’s fiction in particular is often treated as an outright break from postmodernism, variously characterized under the interrelated terms ‘post-postmodernism’, ‘metamodernism’ and ‘the New Sincerity’, influenced partly by his skewering of postmodernism in the essay ‘E Unibus Pluram’.³⁰ Though I find the differentiation between postmodernism and post-postmodernism on the basis of ‘irony’ and ‘sincerity’ overly simplistic, Wallace’s argument that the currents that birthed and sustained early postmodernism had become drained of their subversive potential does provide useful ways to periodize late postmodernist literature. Clearly, these works represent less of an avant-garde than a reflection of ubiquitous consumer capitalism and hegemonic television culture that has made ‘critical distance’ (including the avant-garde) impossible; moreover, their depiction of the difficulties of interpersonal connection places late postmodernism firmly within the context of neoliberal America, in which communal values are eroded by the atomization of consumers and the

²⁷ Olivia Sagan, ‘Narratives of Loneliness and Mental Ill Health in a time of Neoliberalism’, in Olivia Sagan and Eric Miller (ed.), *Narratives of Loneliness: Multidisciplinary Perspectives from the 21st Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017) pp.88-100 (pp.79-80).

²⁸ See Brian McHale, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism*; and Jeremy Green, *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

²⁹ See Larry McCaffrey, ‘An Expanded Interview with David Foster Wallace’, in Stephen J. Burn (ed.), *Conversations with David Foster Wallace* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), pp.21-52 (p.48).

³⁰ For work on David Foster Wallace and post-postmodernism, see Adam Kelly, ‘David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction’, in David Hering (ed.), *Consider David Foster Wallace: Critical Essays* (Los Angeles; Austin: Sideshow Media Group Press, 2010), pp.131-146; and Robert L. McLaughlin, ‘Post-Postmodern Discontent: Contemporary Fiction and the Social World’, *symplekē*, Vol. 12, No.1-2 (2004), pp.53-68.

experience of ‘cyberloneliness’ (as Eric D. Miller has it).³¹ Understood alongside the flurry of millenarian prophecies from theorists like Jameson and Fukuyama, Wallace’s writing could actually represent one of the sharpest encapsulations of ‘postmodernism’ as it reaches hegemonic proportions—in this sense, ‘E Unibus Pluram’ might be taken as the concluding remarks of literary postmodernism at the ‘end of history’.³²

Reading the fiction of authors like Wallace, Helen DeWitt, Carole Maso and Percival Everett alongside earlier iterations of postmodernism, clear points of continuity can be traced. Works of late postmodernism still show a fervour for metatextuality, a juxtaposition of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, an interest in the workings of language, and a ‘resistance to closure’ similar to their forbears, many of whom would have been studied by these authors at University.³³ More specifically to this thesis, iterations of the Prodigious Child show many points in common with children shown in the previous two chapters; in particular, the child of late postmodernism bears a particular kinship with the Animate Child, in its centring of the world of childhood against a drab, external backdrop of the ‘adult’. Like works by Barthelme and Coover, this often invokes tropes from children’s literature, though instead of comics and fairy tales we see the influence of more recent children’s readers like *Tom Swift*, *The Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew*, which flatter their audience with gifted young protagonists able to surpass all adult expectation. This emphasis upon the ability of children, often in inverse proportion to the ignorance and tedium of most adults, also centres the imagination of the child in a way that recalls John Barth and Fran Ross, whose protagonists might be seen as ‘child prodigies’ in their own right. *Lost in the Funhouse*’s Ambrose provides a particularly important antecedent given that, despite his imaginative energy he remains unhappy, an outcast in family and school, and it must be said that the similarities between the Prodigious and Animate Child do not extend to the latter’s emphasis upon simple joy. Instead, we see a continuation of the dysfunctional and fractured families that beset the children of Heller, Vonnegut, Acker and Morrison, and similar anxieties about the child’s premature encounters with an ‘adult’ world.

³¹ See Eric D. Miller, ‘Cyberloneliness: The Curse of the Cursor’, in Sagan and Miller (eds.), *Narratives of Loneliness*, pp.41-51.

³² See Francis Fukuyama, ‘The End of History?’, *The National Interest*, No. 16 (1989), pp. 3–18.

³³ Mark McGurl emphasizes that during the ‘70s and ‘80s ‘Creative Writing’ courses were becoming a staple of Higher Education in America, and a new generation of young US authors were tutored under the ‘aggressively experimental writers who came of age in the sixties’ (including Barthelme, Barth, Reed, Katz and Sukenick). See Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp.264-5; and Mark McGurl, ‘The Institution of Nothing: David Foster Wallace in The Program’, *Boundary 2*, Vol. 41, No.3 (Fall 2014), pp.27-54.

Even if I see many of the works of this chapter within a late or transitional phase of postmodernist literature, we could also note some important differences between these authors and those of the last chapter. Here, a better differentiation than simply ‘recuperative sincerity’ versus ‘toxic irony’ might be to note an emphasis upon narrower and more localized forms of communication: instead of locating characters within an ossified ‘Structure’ of cultural hegemonies, we see more focus on familial and romantic relationships; instead of deconstructing the discursive manoeuvres that delimit identity, we see a focus on the workings of individual consciousness. In this increasing focus on the ‘inner’ life, as opposed to ‘outer’ systems of social interpellation, works of late postmodernism seem to move away from the Foucauldian notion of identities shaped from without, and culturally situate characters in the broad strokes of American life. At its widest, this can even reach for a universalist engagement with the ‘human’, as Mary K. Holland notes, inviting an empathetic connection between disparate characters rather than emphasizing the cultural fissures that divide and hierarchise.³⁴ These texts still seem unable to move beyond the epistemological crises of postmodernism, or the recognition that meaning is culturally situated—hence the continuing tendency to emphasise the essential artifice of textual representation, and the role of the author in mediating even a ‘realistic’ depiction of the world—but often reach more for what Richard Rorty has termed a ‘postmodern pragmatism’. Essentially, even if knowledge cannot claim any basis to universal truth, the question remains: how can we continue to live, and to live well, in such a world?³⁵ Particularly in the accelerated culture of postmodernity, in which ethical concerns are muddled by the convergence of the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’, and communal consensus is frayed by a solipsistic consumer culture, these questions seem key to the viability of ‘postmodernism’ as we move into a new century.³⁶

Late postmodernists’ response to the culture of postmodernity, then, represents both an inheritance from earlier writers and a hint toward the future. The Prodigious Child shows a generation of authors who grew up amid the same milieu as the Animate Child, and the same crises of the family that inform the Preterite Child. The culture into which they grew as teenagers and young adults—and eventually writers—was no less obsessed with youth than the ‘50s and

³⁴ Mary K. Holland, *Succeeding Postmodernism: Language and Humanism in Contemporary American Literature* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.11.

³⁵ See Clare Hayes-Brady, *The Unspeakable Failure of David Foster Wallace: Language, Identity and Resistance* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp.80-91; and Barry Allen, ‘Postmodern Pragmatism: Richard Rorty’s Transformation of American Philosophy’, *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 36, No.1 (Spring 2008), pp.1-15.

³⁶ The focus on family relationships, for example, which is rarely found in most early postmodernist texts, takes centre stage in the work of Jonathan Franzen, Jonathan Safran Foer, Dave Eggers and Lionel Shriver.

'60s, with a booming child culture industry often at the bleeding edge of new technologies, and a set of hypothetical children increasingly at the forefront of political discourse. Just as young Boomers had once been praised as 'a new kind of generation' from their parents, the Prodigious Child often seems a new species altogether, looked upon with equal parts wonderment and horror by adults.³⁷ Whilst still betraying the centrality of youth to America's culture at large, this is a youth culture shorn of much of the subversive energy that sustained the Animate Child, and writers of late postmodernism recognise the extent to which this energy has become co-opted by television shows, advertisements, and youth-targeted outlets like MTV. Instead of student protests and juvenile delinquency, the child of late postmodernism draws upon geeks, gamers, and a constant cycle of fads and toys; well-positioned to absorb the newest trends in American culture, the child is suddenly the repository of a huge wealth of information. The reliance of youth culture upon electronic technologies betrays anxieties about the psychological effects upon the child growing up in this culture, and therein gestures more broadly to the difficulties of cultivating a healthy mind, spirit, and ethical framework in an increasingly fragmented 'postmodern' world. This world fulfils earlier postmodernists' anxieties about the 'adult' influence shaping children, and gestures ahead toward the world of the Internet, social media, and children's access to 'adult' content in many shapes and sizes. The Prodigious Child voices perhaps the central concern of this culture—that the increasing access to information, entertainment, and virtual contact seems all too often accompanied by an inverse dearth of emotional or spiritual fulfilment.

Children, Television and Familial Decline

Any account of the American childhood in the second half of the twentieth century must remark upon the influence of television. At the same time as the Baby Boom was hitting its heights in the mid-century, the number of American households with a television exploded, from about 0.02 per cent in 1946 to over ninety in 1960; by the 1970s and '80s this number was near one hundred.³⁸ Meanwhile, the amount of watching time steadily grew, from an average of five hours per day in the mid-'50s to over six in the early '70s, and over seven in the '80s. Seen as a 'family medium' at its outset, the success of the Mickey Mouse Club (first aired in 1955) quickly

³⁷ See '50 Years Ago This Week: How Young People Changed the World', *Time* <<https://time.com/4607270/1967-january-6-anniversary/>> [accessed 23 August 2019].

³⁸ See Stephen Kline, *Out of the Garden: Toys, TV, and Children's Culture in the Age of Marketing* (London; New York: Verso, 1993), pp.119-122; and William Douglas, *Television Families: Is Something Wrong in Suburbia?* (Mahwahm, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003), pp.7-8.

underlined the potential for child-targeted programming, and the profitability of child-targeted advertising.³⁹ As Stephen Kline notes, the following decades ‘brought the children’s sector from the fringes of influential marketing into the inner regions of targeted marketing’, boosting expenditure on children’s advertisements from about 250 million dollars in the mid-fifties to over 750 million dollars in the mid-eighties.⁴⁰ Much of this was fed by a growing children’s toy market, which had become so entangled with children’s television programming by the ‘80s and ‘90s that it inspired a wealth of kids shows designed with tie-in merchandise, or even shows based on extant toys. The profitability of children’s television, aided by the creation and popularization of cable television, led to an explosion of children’s television programming at the end of the century, and no shortage of young watchers.⁴¹ Estimates in the 1990s suggested that ‘by graduation from high school the average child will have spent over 20,000 hours watching television and only 11,000 in the classroom’, exposed from birth to around ‘18,000-21,000 commercial messages’ each year.⁴²

The effects of children’s television watching became a particularly controversial topic in the 1980s and ‘90s. Whilst some academic studies (including Cy Schneider’s *Children’s Television* and Hodge and Tripp’s *Children and Television: A Semiotic Approach*) took a fairly sober evidence-based approach to the subject, others were openly alarmist in their account of children corrupted by unfettered access to images of sex and violence. Neil Postman speaks of ‘children [who] begin to watch TV with systematic attention by the age of thirty-six months’ as evidence for the fact that ‘unlike books, [...] the TV image is available to everyone, regardless of age’; this is liable to give children previously unknown knowledge of all the ‘frightening, sordid, or confusing’ facts of adult life.⁴³ According to Postman, this explains ‘the unprecedented change in both the frequency and brutality of child crime’, and the ‘increased level of sexual activity among children’.⁴⁴ Such anxieties about the links between television watching and mental illness or crime in young people became a mainstay of political discourse in the 1980s; though such criticism of the harmful effects of child culture was hardly new, the decade’s obsession with ‘family values’ brought

³⁹ Lynn Spigel, ‘Seducing the Innocent: Childhood and Television in Postwar America’, in William Solomon and Robert McChesney (eds.), *Ruthless Criticism: New Perspectives in U.S. Communication History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp.259-90.

⁴⁰ Kline, *Out of the Garden*, p.167.

⁴¹ See Alison Alexander and James Owers, ‘The Economics of Children’s Television’, in J. Alison Bryant (ed.), *The Children’s Television Community* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007), pp.57-74.

⁴² Kline, *Out of the Garden*, p.17.

⁴³ Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, pp.78-80.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp.134-6.

influential voices like Jerry Falwell and Tipper Gore, and organizations like the Coalition for Better Television, to remark on the necessity to censor or regulate children's television.⁴⁵ Even Benjamin Spock, the champion of permissive parenting decades earlier, criticized children's 'steady diet of playing violent video games' and watching 'violent cartoons and television shows' for eroding the traditional family unit.⁴⁶ The decline of the American family, as conservative commentators constantly emphasized, came hand in hand with the lack of communal activity necessitated by television watching, and the lack of traditional values that these shows expounded. American families should instead strive to become, as President George H.W. Bush famously had it, 'closer to the Waltons than the Simpsons'.⁴⁷

As Bush's aphorism should warn us, much conservative pining for the 'traditional' family was rooted, ironically, in the medium they so often maligned. Scholarship by William Douglas, Estella Tincknell and Stephanie Coontz has underscored the extent to which the ideal of 'family values' expressed in the 1980s was rooted in the images of the family found in 1950s TV advertisements, and family sitcoms like *Leave it to Beaver*.⁴⁸ Despite the idealization of the '50s family, these images showed 'minimal convergence between fictional families and real families' in the post-war decades; they were mainly deployed as 'the "wrapper" for an extension of commodity production', or as a blandly 'homogenized' vision of the white middle-class with widespread appeal, necessitated by a television landscape in which a handful of channels had to vie for the attention of viewers.⁴⁹ Simply put, the suburban American family of the 1950s both constructed, and was constructed by, these 'television families', a reciprocity through which we can approach novels of the family by Don DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon and David Foster Wallace. All depict the centrality of television to the lives of American families (and particularly children) at the end of the century, whilst recognizing that the 'happy family' against which they were judged is primarily simulacra. In Wallace's *Broom of the System*, for instance, a dysfunctional family conducts 'family theatre' wherein they don masks of their own faces, and act out happy

⁴⁵ See Tipper Gore, *Raising PG Kids in an X-rated Society* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983); and Heather Hendershot, *Saturday Morning Censors: Television Regulation before the V-chip* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998).

⁴⁶ Benjamin Spock, *Rebuilding America Family Values: A Better World for our Children* (Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books, 1996), p.77.

⁴⁷ This comment was made by the President on the 1992 re-election campaign at the convention of the National Religious Broadcasters. See Moritz Fink, *The Simpsons: A Cultural History* (Lanham, MD; Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), p.11.

⁴⁸ See Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Estella Tincknell, *Mediating the Family: Gender, Culture and Representation* (London: Hodder Education, 2005); and Douglas, *Television Families*.

⁴⁹ Douglas, *Television Families*, p.13; Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, pp.174-5.

interactions; in DeLillo's *White Noise* a father views his sleeping children as 'figures in an ad for the Rosicrucians'.⁵⁰ The reality of family life and an 'idealized version of the White American nuclear family' seen in televisual images starts to blur, inviting an ideal of family life which both maligns the effect of late capitalist culture on the family and, perversely, encourages Americans to embrace a vision of 'nuclear family bliss' rooted in TV and advertisements.⁵¹

Such a model of postmodern American life bears clear debts to the theories of Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard provides perhaps the most historically grounded account of the postmodernist 'crisis of representation', positing how the proliferation of signs (made possible by the spread of electronic media) has affected our relationship to 'the real'. As Jim Collins has noted, television plays an important role in Baudrillard's critique here, being both 'cause and symptom' of the 'information explosion'; as argued in his *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), the prodigious consumption of television leaves us with 'more and more information, and less and less meaning'.⁵² Whilst 24-hour news channels claim merely to be documenting 'real life', their carefully staged interviews and meticulously chosen camera-angles seem a kind of drama in their own right; meanwhile, the pre-eminence of advertising 'absorbs' all other 'modes of expression', demanding that they be similarly 'instantaneous and instantaneously forgotten'.⁵³ Ostensibly a 'reflection of a profound reality' (a crisis happening somewhere in the world, a product that can be bought) the sign retreats from the 'real' until it 'has no relation to reality whatsoever'.⁵⁴ The 'sign' becomes 'simulacrum', a copy with no original, and the experience of 'real life' becomes instead the experience of a 'hyperreality', a procession of these simulacra that effaces the boundaries between the real and the virtual.⁵⁵ Without any 'reality' to meaningfully affect, American political life becomes essentially self-circulating, a repetition of familiar slogans and images (of which the 'happy family' is one) meant both to perpetuate itself and its predominant function—to invite more and more Americans into a paradise of 'mass affluence', in which one's political responsibility is primarily the consumption of newer and better products.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ David Foster Wallace, *The Broom of the System* (London: Abacus, 1997), p.165-173; Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (New York: Picador, 2011), p.181.

⁵¹ Tincknell, *Mediating the Family*, p.5; Lyn Spigel, 'Seducing the Innocent', p.260.

⁵² Jim Collins, 'Television and Postmodernism', in R.C. Allen (ed.), *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled* (University of North Carolina Press, 1992) pp.327-353 (pp.331-2); Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p.79.

⁵³ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p.87.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.6-7.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.21-2; see also Umberto Eco, 'Travels in Hyperreality', trans. William Weaver, in *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt, 1986), pp.1-58.

⁵⁶ Michael Gane, *Jean Baudrillard: In Radical Uncertainty* (London; Sterling, VI: Pluto Press, 2000), pp.40-2.

Perhaps the preeminent American author of the postmodernist ‘simulacra’, Don DeLillo began his career in the early 1970s after a career in advertising. He cannot, therefore, be called a ‘late postmodernist’ in the same way as most of the other authors in this chapter; both he and Pynchon (whose novel of television, *Vineland*, was published in 1990) were born in the 1930s, unlike David Foster Wallace, a late Boomer born in 1963. Within this study DeLillo is thus frustratingly elusive, particularly since we see shades of both the Animate and Preterite Child in his early work. In *Americana* (1971), the narrator recounts seeing ‘war photographs’ of ‘a woman holding a dead child’, around which ‘eight other children’ are pictured ‘smiling and waving’; later, an encounter with a childhood baseball cap reminds him of a ‘magical child’s belief in the infinities of common things’.⁵⁷ Clearly, his position at the tail end of the long Sixties gives him a sense both of the countercultural optimism of the 1960s and the pessimism of the later Vietnam years, and his novel *Ratner’s Star* (1976) also shows an interesting transition-point between the imaginative child of the 1960s and the ‘child prodigy’ of the 1990s. Even from his first novel, however, DeLillo recognizes the influence of television on the American psyche in a way that is conspicuously absent from many of his peers. His insistence that TV is little more than ‘an electronic set of packaging’, which gives the country its wish of ‘the universal third person, the man we all want to be’, prefigures Baudrillard’s insistence that all forms of representation were being ‘absorbed in advertising’.⁵⁸ Consonantly, Frank Lentricchia and Jeremy Green have noted the ‘primal image’ of DeLillo’s work as the character who ‘identifies with the image on television or film, dreaming a magical passage from one order of reality to another’.⁵⁹ From the suburban American family to the assassins of American Presidents, all are susceptible to being caught up in this ‘limitless televisual universe’, and losing their grasp on whatever ‘reality’ remains.⁶⁰

This comes to the fore in *White Noise* (1985), one of the rare domestic novels in the postmodernist canon. Set contemporaneously to its publication, the Gladneys resemble a parodic estimation of the 1980s middle-class American family: children are hewn together from multiple marriages and divorces; each parent is unaware of their partner’s clandestine affairs; and the main

⁵⁷ Don DeLillo, *Americana* (St Ives: Penguin, 2006), pp.86, 287.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.270-1.

⁵⁹ Jeremy Green, ‘Libra’, in J. Duvall (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 94-107; see also Frank Lentricchia, ‘Libra as Postmodern Critique’, in Frank Lentricchia (ed.), *Introducing Don DeLillo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp.193-215 (p.195).

⁶⁰ Collins, ‘Television and Postmodernism’, p.331.

family ‘custom and [...] rule’ comes in watching television together one night a week.⁶¹ Whilst DeLillo thereby shows continuing engagement with a familiar narrative of familial decline, the dysfunction of the family seems to have settled into an unspoken inertia that seldom intrudes on their daily lives. Numbed by the ‘narcotic undertow’ of television (one of many comparisons between television and drug use to define this chapter) their relationship is defined less by conflict than estrangement, and Jack Gladney’s narration frames his children in curiously impersonal terms.⁶² In contrast to the broadly sympathetic portrayal of children in the literature treated thus far, the Gladney children show an inscrutability that often evokes the ‘evil child’: the fourteen-year-old Heinrich, for instance, is noted for his prematurely receding hairline and his habit of playing online chess with a convicted murderer, which makes his parents worry that he will become a school shooter.⁶³ Similarly, Gladney catches his daughter Steffie burning toast at night because she likes the smell, and approaches his daughter Bee ‘in a distant and uneasy way, sensing a nameless threat, as if she were not my child at all’.⁶⁴ Even the infant-age Wilder is viewed with bewilderment, crying for so inexplicably long that he has to be taken to the hospital, and (in a scene that owes much to Kubrick’s adaptation of *The Shining*), followed on a tricycle as he blithely runs across traffic.⁶⁵

In each, the enigmatic nature of the child moves Jack Gladney to view his children with ‘something like awe’, albeit one that often unsettles in professing the inaccessibility of the child’s mind.⁶⁶ As Paul Giaimo has observed, this detachment partly demonstrates the self-absorption of Jack and Babette, who commonly misplace Wilder and fail to note their eleven-year-old Denise’s anxiety after the chemical spill that upends the family halfway through the novel.⁶⁷ Yet the gap between the Gladney children and parents also testifies to this younger generation’s far superior ability to navigate contemporary American culture. For one, they embrace the consumerist imperative of American political life in a way that eludes their Boomer parents; at a local mall they become ‘guides to [Jack’s] endless well-being’, eagerly recommending him clothes, fast food and anything else ‘he might want or need’.⁶⁸ Moreover, they can absorb the surfeit of

⁶¹ DeLillo, *White Noise*, pp.64-5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.19.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.56, 112.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.370-2.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.94.

⁶⁷ Paul Giaimo, *Appreciating Don DeLillo: The Moral Force of a Writer’s Work* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), pp.83-4.

⁶⁸ DeLillo, *White Noise*, p.99.

information made possible by electronic media, even if this information has questionable value or reliability; thus, Jack overhears them talk confidently at the dinner table about subjects ranging from the work of Tennessee Williams to the culinary uses of camel meat.⁶⁹ Murray's subsequent supposition here that the 'family is the cradle of the world's misinformation' testifies to the artificial unity of the family as mediated by cultural and political discourse—clearly, the rhetoric of 'family values' is useful because it obscures less convenient 'hostile facts' about American life.⁷⁰ Whereas this recognition of the family as simulacral disturbs Jack, however, his children seem fully primed to participate in a world shorn of objective 'reality', having little sense of or concern for the discontinuity between the real and the virtual. It is for this reason that Steffie enjoys speaking to automated voices on the telephone, and Wilder is unable to distinguish his mother from her image on a television; having grown up in the world of the hyperreal, they lack their father-narrator's ability to distinguish vestiges of material reality in their quotidian life.⁷¹

DeLillo's emphasis upon the influence of electronic technologies puts an almost parodic accent on the detached wonder with which Jack views his children. Though Ellen Pifer notes the influence of Wordsworth in the 'mystical' dimensions of the child in *White Noise*, she rightly tempers this view by emphasizing the contemporary context of the novel: here, 'it is no longer the poet's faith in natural innocence [...] that sustains the child's privileged image; rather, it is the crucial position that children occupy in the marketing scheme'.⁷² Murray's insistence that contemporary America 'is the society of kids' shows a recognition that children have not only become co-opted by malevolent 'adult' forces, but so central to the world of capitalist consumption that it can no longer even be distinguished as uniquely 'adult'.⁷³ DeLillo thereby provides an important contrast to the Romantic dimensions of the Animate Child, in which children are usually opposed to a corporate 'adulthood' in a way that preserves within them some former, pre-capitalist and pre-electronic ideal of society. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, for instance, real children can foster an 'unpenetrated sense of community' by playing outdoors, far from the 'printed circuit' of San Narciso.⁷⁴ *White Noise*, on the other hand, shows the electronic marketing

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.97-8.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ For more on possible changes in children's psychology with relation to media, especially in the age of the internet, see Patti M. Valkenburg, *Children's Responses to the Screen: A Media Psychological Approach* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004); and Patti M. Valkenburg and Jessica Taylor Piotrowski (eds.), *Plugged in: How Media Attract and Affect Youth* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017).

⁷² Pifer, *Demon or Doll*, p.213.

⁷³ DeLillo, *White Noise*, pp.59-60.

⁷⁴ Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.89-90, 13.

scheme to be omnipresent in children's lives, even to the psychological depths of 'every child's brain noise'; in a famous scene, Jack experiences a 'cosmic' epiphany in hearing his daughter repeat the words 'Toyota Celicia' in her sleep, before realizing that she is merely reciting the name of a car that she has overheard on TV.⁷⁵ Consonant with what Fukuyama called the 'ineluctable spread of consumerist Western culture' throughout the world (the name of the car is, after all, 'supranational' and 'universally pronounceable'), DeLillo suggests that even the mind of the child has, by the last decades of the twentieth century, been colonized by late capitalism.⁷⁶

It is for this reason that, like Pifer, I find it hard to read the 'splendid transcendence' of Jack's epiphanies as purely ironic. Though they provide a bathetic recognition of television's influence on childhood psychosocial development, Jack's wonder testifies to the particular ability of this new generation to exist within the brave new world of 'hyperreal'.⁷⁷ If not 'gifted children', their expertise in navigating media channels certainly makes them precocious, much more informed (if not well-informed) about 'adult' matters than even their parents. This does seem to come at the cost, however, of a level of empathy—his children eagerly watch 'plane crash footage' on the television with no thought of its human consequences—and thereby estrange them from their potential as autonomous human subjects.⁷⁸ Seen in the corporate colonization of Steffie's unconscious, and Wilder's receptiveness to televisual images over people, the Prodigious Child shows a mind impressionable to consumer culture with less recourse to human contact or material reality, and therein shows the potential for the 'the end of interiority and intimacy', in Baudrillard's terms.⁷⁹ As will become a theme in this chapter, the child betrays a fear that the surfeit of information made possible by the spread of high technology will inversely diminish their capacity for human kindness or community: compared to the children of the last chapters, we might say that the child acts less as an ideal than a warning. Essentially, if the Animate Child harks back to a time of primordial innocence, the Prodigious Child looks ahead to a strange new generation—one fully transplanted into the 'inanimate' world of television, video games, and computers.

⁷⁵ DeLillo, *White Noise*, p.181.

⁷⁶ Fukuyama, 'The End of History', p.3.

⁷⁷ DeLillo, *White Noise*, p.181; see also Pifer, *Demon or Doll*, pp.219-221.

⁷⁸ DeLillo, *White Noise*, p.75.

⁷⁹ Baudrillard here compares the subject of late capitalism to the mind of the schizophrenic, following Deleuze and Guattari's use of the term with relation to postmodernity. Comparing the mind of the child to forms of mental illness will become a consistent theme in the next section of this chapter. See Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies* trans. Jim Fleming (London: Pluto Press, 1999), pp.69-70.

Following DeLillo's novel of 'television families', Pynchon's *Vineland* voices an even clearer indictment of the medium. The avowed Luddite Pynchon is explicit in his belief that television watching is compulsive and harmful to the human spirit; characters in the novel must undergo rehabilitation courses for 'Tube' addiction, and communities of perpetual television watchers experience life 'like death, only different'.⁸⁰ These depictions of wilful inertia recall the presence of the 'inanimate' in *V.*, and *Vineland* sees the continuation (or perhaps confirmation) of threads from Pynchon's first novel, substituting the robots 'SHOCK' and 'SHROUD' for 'Chuck' and 'Raoul', and the human yo-yo Benny Profane with the pinball wizard Zoyd Wheeler.⁸¹ Whilst Zoyd's memories of his baby Prairie (born in the late '60s) remind him of an innocent, 'slower-moving time, predigital, not yet so cut into pieces', the present-day narrative of 1984—both an obvious Orwellian reference and the *annus horribilis* of the Reagan years—recognize child culture to be fundamentally implicated in electronic late capitalism.⁸² Prairie's half-brother Justin, for instance, finds a rare break in watching *Transformers* to demonstrate an impression of Ronald Reagan he had learned from the television, and answers his parents' question about the administration's 'budget stuff' from material gleaned from PBS News Hour.⁸³ Later, Justin recalls a friend in kindergarten who recommended 'pretend[ing] his parents were characters in a television sitcom' to alleviate the stress of family life.⁸⁴ Like the Gladney children, Justin's precocity is linked to the flow of information from constant television watching, and Pynchon also laments that this virtual world might provide an easy alternative to human interaction.

Particularly given Pynchon's tendency to associate childhood with a time of privileged freedom, the child's reliance on television forms an arresting new image of decline. In this sense, *Vineland* might be seen to continue some of the anxieties of *Gravity's Rainbow*, in which the world of the child is increasingly co-opted and delimited by the capitalist 'Structure'; certainly, Prairie's journey from carefree baby to anxious teen (alongside DL's journey into 'white slavery' as a teenager) shows something of the tragic trajectory of Ilse and Bianca.⁸⁵ By having the fifteen-year-old Prairie as focaliser, however, *Vineland* centres the mental world of the child in a way not

⁸⁰ Thomas Pynchon, *Vineland* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.170-1, 335.

⁸¹ See *Ibid.*, p.153.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.38.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp.87-8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.351.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.135.

seen since ‘The Secret Integration’, soliloquizing the young girl’s fears growing up apart from her estranged mother. Her memories of watching ‘teenagers in sitcoms’ and ‘girls in commercials learning from their moms about how to cook and dress’ implies much of her yearnings for family life as rooted in simulacra, but reveals an overtly sentimental interest in the child’s experience of familial dysfunction absent from much of Pynchon’s previous fiction.⁸⁶ The centring of the family in general has been emphasized as a new development in Pynchon’s work by critics like Geoffrey Greene and N. Katherine Hayle; unlike the ‘abstract epistemological quests’ of Pynchon’s previous characters to find quasi-mythic personages (V), organizations (the Trystero), and totems (the Schwarzgerät), Prairie’s search for her estranged mother takes place on an altogether more human scale.⁸⁷ Though I would stop short of David Cowart’s suggestion that *Vineland* is thereby ‘less devoted to indeterminate postmodernist “play” than to ‘totalizing modernist “purpose”’, it is striking that Pynchon shows such nostalgia for the ‘family unit’ in a novel about the corrosive effects of television.⁸⁸ Encountered in his earlier canon as one of many stifling norms and institutions against which children are wont to rebel, *Vineland* seems instead to yearn for familial togetherness, and the reunion of Prairie and Frenesi toward the end of the novel represents a rare moment of catharsis in a canon otherwise defined by failure.

Accounting for this newfound emphasis upon ‘the nurture of children in a family’, critics like Hume, Cowart and Hayles have approached *Vineland* as a kind of ‘condition-of-America’ novel.⁸⁹ As will become a lasting thread in Pynchon’s later canon, the breakup of the Wheeler family at the end of the 1960s laments ‘the failure of the sixties to solve the problems the radical movement shouted to the nation’, and Prairie’s attempts to reconnect with her mother reflect characters’ more general longing to return to the 1960s’ promise of grace from the neoliberal ‘snitch culture’ of the ‘80s.⁹⁰ Whereas the Wheeler family developed amid a melange of tight-knit hippie communities (‘families’ in their own right), Pynchon avers that ‘family values’ in the 1980s became a convenient pretext for ‘Reaganite folks’ to justify ‘fuckin’ around with’ real families.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp.326-7.

⁸⁷ Joseph Tabbi, ‘Pynchon’s Groundward Art’, in Geoffrey Greene, Donald J. Grenier and Larry McCaffrey (eds.), *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon’s Novel* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994), pp.89-100 (pp.91-2).

⁸⁸ David Cowart, ‘Attenuated Postmodernism: Pynchon’s *Vineland*’, in *The Vineland Papers*, pp.3-13 (p.4).

⁸⁹ Hume notes this emphasis upon ‘nurture’ continues in Pynchon’s subsequent works. See Kathryn Hume, ‘The Religious and Political Vision of *Against the Day*’, in Jeffrey Severs and Christopher Leise (ed.), *Pynchon’s Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim’s Guide* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2011), pp.167-190 (p.179); Cowart, ‘Attenuated Postmodernism’, p.12; N. Katherine Hayles, “‘Who Was Saved?’ Families, Snitches, and Recuperation in Pynchon’s *Vineland*”, in *The Vineland Papers*, pp.14-30.

⁹⁰ Hayles, ‘Who Was Saved?’, p.15.

⁹¹ Pynchon, *Vineland*, pp.30-1.

Pynchon's references to the crippling cuts made by the Reagan administration show perhaps the clearest attempt by the author to voice his criticism of American conservatism, but belies the overlaps between his criticism of television in family life and that of broadly conservative commentators at the time. His recognition that the '80s saw television become 'a member of the household', and that children's lives were increasingly becoming structured around digital technologies echoes the work of Postman and Winn, whose books *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985) and *The Plug-In Drug* (1977) similarly depict television as an addictive influence on the lives of children, and one which encourages cultural stagnation more broadly.⁹² Postman's anxieties about the premature exposure of the child mind to 'adult violence' and sexuality, the 'incompetence of political leaders' and 'the joys of consumerism' find a counterpart in the precocity of television-obsessed Justin, and the teenage Isaiah's idea for a 'chain of violence centers', with 'paramilitary fantasy adventures, gift shops and food courts, and video game rooms for the kids'.⁹³ Again, television is seen as a threatening influence to the values that children so often represent in Pynchon's earlier fiction—namely, the importance of community and kinship, as a locus of resistance to the adult-curated energies of violence and capital.

The emphasis in *Vineland* upon the need for recuperative communal values in the face of a solipsistic 'Tubal' culture pre-empt the most celebrated work of late postmodernism, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*. Wallace's essay 'E Unibus Pluram' does single out Pynchon and DeLillo as 'ahead of their time' in their understanding of television, but recognizes that Wallace himself undoubtedly knew far more about the medium than any of his postmodernist forbears.⁹⁴ Whereas writers born in the '30s like DeLillo and Pynchon approach television (and young television watchers) as a strange new development, Boomers like Wallace grew up with television as something to be 'lived with instead of just looked at'.⁹⁵ As an author whose youth coincided both with the popularization of television and the increasingly child-centric culture of the 1960s, Wallace is indeed very perceptive in noting how these forces affect and co-opt children. In the short story 'Westward the Course of Empire Makes its Way', for instance, he depicts a cast reunion for people who starred in McDonald's advertisements as children, and in *Infinite Jest* a TV mascot called 'Mr Bouncety-Bounce' is enlisted to warn children about the dangers of the

⁹² Ibid., p.348.

⁹³ Postman, *Disappearance of Childhood*, p.95; Pynchon, *Vineland*, p.19.

⁹⁴ Wallace, 'E Unibus Pluram', pp.42-3.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

eponymous film—both are sharply satirical, but based in fact.⁹⁶ Like Pynchon, his fiction abounds with tokens of child culture, including Gerber’s Baby Foods, Mattel, decoder rings, Batman comics, and family-oriented television shows like *The Brady Bunch* and *All in the Family*, often set specifically alongside more recognizably ‘high’ art forms or complex theory.⁹⁷ Whilst this does show a typically postmodernist challenge to the expectation of ‘serious’ fiction, Wallace notes any account of American culture by the end of the century must include the ubiquity of television; instead of ‘help[ing] create a mood of irony and irreverence’, these references to television culture are needed ‘to be just plain realistic’.⁹⁸

Approaching the ‘television family’ from the position of insider, Wallace still comes to markedly similar conclusions as Pynchon, Postman and Winn as to its more toxic effects. The portrayal of the ‘plug-in drug’ reaches its apex in *Infinite Jest* (1996), a novel that places television amongst a gamut of different ‘addictions’ in U.S. life, and shows within the titular film a type of watching that will literally ‘amuse yourself to death’. Wallace’s focus on Narcotics and Alcoholics Anonymous shows this logical progress of addiction: an activity that starts with the pursuit of pleasure quickly becomes obsessive, sustains itself to minimize the pain of absence, and eventually continues to the point of sacrificing health long after ‘it had long since stopped being a release or relief or fun’.⁹⁹ Though Wallace’s early canon does register alarm at children co-opted by this ‘adult’ culture—in *The Broom of the System*, for instance, one young character who ‘watches television all the time’ distinguishes ‘types’ of dog as ‘brands’, whilst another starts to impersonate Richard Nixon after watching the Watergate trial—children (and especially infants) are more often deployed as ugly archetypes of American postmodern culture.¹⁰⁰ This makes Wallace’s canon a notable exception to the sympathetic portrayals of children that defines much previous postmodernism, and short stories like ‘Suicide as a Sort of Present’ and ‘On His Deathbed’ instead associate children with the monstrosity of the true ‘prodigy’:

The incontinence. The vomit. The sheer smell. The noise. The theft of sleep. The selfishness, the appalling selfishness of the newborn, you have no idea. [...] Even as an infant the power he

⁹⁶ See Joe L. Kincheloe, “Consuming the All-American Corporate Burger: McDonald’s “Does It All For You””, in Jennifer A. Sandlin and Peter McLaren (eds.), *Critical Pedagogies of Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp.137-47; and Brian Wilcox and Dale Kunkel, “Taking Television Seriously: Children and Television Policy”, in Edward F. Zigler et al. (eds.) *Children, Families and Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.333-350.

⁹⁷ See, for instance, the short story ‘Tri-Stan: I Sold Sissee Nar to Ecko’, in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (London: Abacus, 2001), pp.200-217; *Broom of the System*, p.352.

⁹⁸ Wallace, ‘E Unibus Pluram’, p.43.

⁹⁹ David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest* (London: Abacus, 2014), p.22.

¹⁰⁰ Wallace, *Broom of the System*, pp.76, 399.

wielded! I learned the bottomless greed of him. Of my son. Of arrogance past imagining. The regal greed and thoughtless disorder and mindless cruelty—the literal thoughtlessness of him.¹⁰¹

Here, a dying father's description of his son is almost Burroughsian in its dysphemism. Recalling Anna Czarowus' analysis of the medieval child, the son's infantile features are framed as inherently 'not human': his 'small soft moist face' apparently looks 'more like a circle of cheese with features like pinches in some ghastly dough'.¹⁰² For the misanthropic father of the story, the grotesqueness of the child's 'pinched snout' and 'wet hanging lip' betray his 'essential disorder of character', a lack of empathy or critical self-awareness that results in a 'literal thoughtlessness'.¹⁰³

Wallace's tendency to display the physical difference of infants as disturbing (particularly when they are compared with adults) speaks to the variously abject and grotesque potential of the young body. As much as the young body can be fetishized as an object of sexualized 'cuteness', scholarship by Christine Wilkie-Stibbs, Natasha Hurley and Stephen Bruhm has argued that it can also act to transgress qualities about physical and sexual 'norms', and probe fears about 'bodily' existence.¹⁰⁴ Wallace seems to associate this unsettling physical difference with a broader mental inarticulacy ('literal thoughtlessness'), significant given that the boy in 'On His Deathbed' is labelled an 'infant' amid specific references to a succession of life stages.¹⁰⁵ The word 'infant' derives from the Latin *infans*, meaning 'unable to speak', which invites a particular horror for Wallace: it not only shows the disturbing inscrutability of the child's mind, but represents the apogee of a solipsistic U.S. television culture. The medium both precludes communication—replacing human interaction with a series of voyeuristic 'watchings'—and encourages viewers to participate in a consumer culture that rewards the pursuit of instant gratification. As Mary K. Holland has noted, the un-worded, ugly rapacity of infancy serves as a powerful metaphor in *Infinite Jest*; amid the wasteland of the Great Concavity, in which the effects of cultural solipsism are quite literally 'toxic', we see a swarm of infants 'the size of

¹⁰¹ David Foster Wallace, 'On His Deathbed, Holding Your Hand, the Acclaimed New Young Off-Broadway Playwright's Father Begs a Boon', in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, pp.218-40 (pp.219-20). See also David Foster Wallace, 'Suicide as a Sort of Present', in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, (London: Abacus, 2001), pp.241-5 (p.243).

¹⁰² Wallace, 'On His Deathbed,' p.220; see also Czarowus, *Monstrous Children in Middle English Literature*, pp.11-12.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.219.

¹⁰⁴ See Christine Wilkie-Stibbs, *The Outside Child, In and Out of the Book* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008); Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); and Lori Merish, 'Cuteness and Commodity Aesthetics', in Romsemary Garland Thompson, (ed.), *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1996), pp.185-203.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.219-20.

prehistoric beasts'.¹⁰⁶ Again, the mental inarticulacy of the infant, in conjunction with an exaggerated physical difference, is employed to display the monstrous effects of late capitalism, which transforms all consumers into 'a chorus of mewling [...] Infants'.¹⁰⁷ Instead of showing the child as being vulnerable to co-optation by malevolent 'adult' forces, as in depictions of the Preterite Child, the 'childish' now seems its central icon.

Wallace's diagnosis of the essentially regressive character of U.S. culture, which is suggested to fray communal solidarity and political responsibility, will be discussed further in the next chapter. For now, we should note the extent to which the child has been shorn of its implicitly oppositional quality to an 'adult' culture of exploitation and profit; the child has become not only implicated in the 'adult', but central to the cultural logic of late capitalism. Though there is often an implicit lament for these children growing up 'too fast', there is also a sense that the kinetic energy of the young seems perfectly suited to the baffling procession of images on television, and that the poorly developed sense of empathy or social responsibility in these young people fits perfectly within a consumer culture of 'Too Much Fun'.¹⁰⁸ Clearly, this culture leaves little room to reflect upon ethical concerns or even personal health: throughout *Infinite Jest*, discussions between the FBI agent Helen Steeply and Canadian terrorist Remy Marathe about the tenets of American culture constantly invoke the idea of a child wanting to eat 'nothing but candy', even if it will cause the child to become sick.¹⁰⁹ This image proves an apt synecdoche for the condition of American consumers more broadly, but is also telling in its overlaps with the contemporary discourse of 'family values', which often referred to negligent parents and undisciplined children as the root cause of familial decline. Whilst Wallace and DeLillo often undercut the conservative beatification of the 'traditional American family'—which is given coherence predominantly by advertisers and sitcom writers—it should be acknowledged that they still hold a lot of stock in these images. Both *White Noise* and *Infinite Jest* centre around affluent white families, with well-educated parents and high-achieving children, and few socioeconomic exigencies outside of their control; though the depiction of addiction, depression and adultery shows them to be far from 'ideal', there is seldom a sense that they are implicated in a larger 'Structure', and their sense of presenting the 'unmarked details of family

¹⁰⁶ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p.562. See also Holland, *Succeeding Postmodernism*, pp.65-74; and Marshall Boswell, *Understanding David Foster Wallace* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), pp.128-135.

¹⁰⁷ Mary K. Holland, 'Infinite Jest', in Clare (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wallace*, pp.127-141 (p.130).

¹⁰⁸ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p.429.

¹⁰⁹ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, pp.321, 428-9; David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King: An Unfinished Novel* (London: Penguin, 2012), pp.132-4.

life' is offset by their obliviousness to their lives as culturally located or materially contingent.¹¹⁰ Especially in Wallace, characters' afflictions are predominantly framed as a personal hurdle rather than a structural problem, and the depiction of Alcoholics Anonymous in *Infinite Jest* constantly reminds us that 'casual attribution' is as bad as 'irony' in response to suffering.¹¹¹

This emphasis upon the individual, especially one dislocated from larger patterns of culture or history, might provide a better avenue to understand the shift from '80s to '90s postmodernism than anything to do with 'sincerity' or 'ethics'. A more notable development is that emphases upon cultural difference are superseded by anxieties about cultural homogeneity, mirroring the account of postmodernity by many contemporary theorists: DeLillo anticipates Fukuyama's suggestion that the 'ineluctable spread of Western consumer capitalism' would lead to a globalized consumerist monoculture, whilst Wallace's portrayal of the co-optation of adversary stances (including 'youth rebellion'), tessellates with Jameson's theory of the obsolescence of critical distance.¹¹² Both attest to the erasure of 'public' and 'private' in their acknowledgement of the intrusion of consumer capitalism into family life, and use these 'television families' to efface the boundaries between 'real' family life and a simulacral family presented on television. Whilst they often show alarm about these facets of postmodernity, their responses can still be seen as a more conservative counterpoint to the postmodernism of previous chapters; the assumption always remains that there are no effective points of resistance to this 'adult' culture, and their account of an alienating 'postmodern condition' usually centres on those enough material and social comfort to participate fully in this consumer culture.¹¹³ For these reasons, it is perhaps inevitable that the child can no longer analogise resistance or opposition—this account of postmodernity acknowledges that childhood animacy (like everything else) has been co-opted as by marketing forces, and children's culture is now a key site in which these forces exert influence. The question becomes less one of opposition to this 'adult' culture, then, and more a question of how one could best exist within it, and the centring

¹¹⁰ For DeLillo and Wallace's centring of white families (particularly through male focalisers), see for instance, Tim Engles, "Who are you, literally?" Fantasies of the White Self in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, in Hugh Ruppersburg and Tim Engles (eds.), *Critical Essays on Don DeLillo* (New York: G.K. Hall and Co, 2000), pp.170-95 (pp.170-1); and Samuel Cohen, 'The Whiteness of David Foster Wallace', in Len Platt and Sara Upstone (eds.), *Postmodern Literature and Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.228-243.

¹¹¹ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p.374.

¹¹² Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', p.3. In *White Noise*, for instance, Murray marvels at an Australian boy 'growing up without television [...] a savage plucked from the bush', as a notable contrast to children like the Gladneys. See DeLillo, *White Noise*, pp.59-60.

¹¹³ On the conservatism of Fukuyama's postmodernism, see Simon Malpas, *The Postmodern* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp.90-2.

of the child's mind allows these authors to explore the effects of this cultural landscape upon the 'inner life' of the postmodern subject. Centrally, as will become a key thread in depictions of child prodigies, the prodigious flow of information seldom cultivates a happy or well-adjusted mind, and the increasingly porous boundaries of the 'real' and the 'virtual' makes it more difficult to gauge where to tap meaning in life.

The Child Prodigy: Postmodernism at the End of the Century

Whilst all the children treated thusfar in this chapter show an increasing precocity—reflecting their invitation into an 'adult' world via television and a commodified children's culture—the rest of the chapter will be dedicated to the true 'child prodigy'. As mentioned, the term 'prodigy' would have originally meant an omen or portent, but grew over the seventeenth century to accentuate the term's sense of wonder or exceptionality. Though it was sometimes used to describe an unusually learned child, the yoking of 'child' and 'prodigy' only became commonplace in the nineteenth century, when it was used to describe a tradition of prepubescent stage-performers whose 'prematurely developed skills and much-vaunted versatility enabled them to blur the lines between child and adult, innocence and experience'.¹¹⁴ The 'extreme precocity' of performers on the early nineteenth-century stage pre-empted the 'fairy stars' of touring American vaudeville shows toward the end of the century, in which children like Master Gus Howard and Lotta Crabtree would 'act the classics, sing, dance, and impersonate' for the pleasure of adults.¹¹⁵ Famously, Dickens parodied the industry in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), in which the 'infant phenomenon' Ninetta Crummles is 'kept up late every night, and put upon an unlimited allowance of gin-and-water', a 'system of training' that keeps her from growing in stature, and gives her an 'aged countenance' beyond her years.¹¹⁶ Dickens' portrayal of Crummles' manipulative training recalls Wordsworth's earlier fears of the 'Infant Prodigy' in the *Prelude*, in which a learned young boy can 'read/ the inside of the Earth, and spell the stars', but leaves 'the playthings, which her love design'd for him/unthought of'; in both, we see the fear

¹¹⁴ Marah Gubar, 'The Drama of Precocity', p.64; see also Hazel Waters, "'That Astonishing Clever Child': Performers and Prodigies in the Early and Mid-Victorian Theatre', *Theatre Notebook*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1996), pp.78-94.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. See also 'Fairy Stars', in Frank Cullen, Florence Hackman and Donald McNeilly (eds.), *Vaudeville Old and New: An Encyclopedia of Variety Performers in America*, Vol. 1 (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), p.367; and William L. Slout and Sue Rudisill, 'The Enigma of the Master Betty Mania', *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Summer 1974), pp.81-90.

¹¹⁶ Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), p.290.

that the prodigy will miss out on the simpler pleasures of a ‘real’ childhood, and will be tainted by the harsher truths of adult life.¹¹⁷

Such earlier accounts should warn us that fears of children growing up too fast in the ‘80s and ‘90s were nothing new, and that the prodigy has long been associated with exploitation. However, the increasing sense in the later twentieth century that children have access to more information than ever before yields a noticeable fascination in the 1980s and ‘90s with the precocious child, be it in reference to an increasingly electronic children’s culture (in films like *War Games* [1982], *Whiz Kids* [1983], and *DARYL* [1985]), in centring children who find humour by outsmarting the adults around them (like Arnold Jackson, Doogie Howzer, and Lisa Simpson), or in monstrous children whose ‘giftedness’ proves a threat to their elders (in the work of Stephen King, for instance). The ambivalent portrayal of the gifted child in these texts, particularly those aimed at an older audience, also speaks to an increasing academic interest in the subject, which often debated the psychological burdens of giftedness and the value of segregating children from their peers in separate or bespoke programs.¹¹⁸ Whereas some earlier understandings of giftedness had emphasized that more ‘adult’ children would be better equipped to deal with the pressures of maturation than their peers, by the ‘80s we see the claim that ‘highly gifted children are more susceptible to some types of developmental difficulties’, and that their mental wellbeing may well be beset by ‘uneven development, perfectionism, adult expectations, [...] alienation, inappropriate environments, and role conflicts’.¹¹⁹ Many empirical studies since have questioned the claim of a link between giftedness and such developmental difficulties, and both Niehart and Eysenck have posited that ‘the number of people making claims about the psychology of gifted children is greater than the number of people who bother

¹¹⁷ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude (1850 version)*, in Jonathan Wordsworth et al. (eds.), *The Prelude: 1899, 1805, 1850* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979), Book V, ll.317-18, 337-8.

¹¹⁸ Between the late sixties and the early nineties ‘giftedness’ became a key notion in American educational theory, with the publication of *Education of the Gifted and Talented* (1972), *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative For Education Reform* (1983), and *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America’s Talent* (1993). In addition, these decades saw an increasing focus on the potential for separate ‘gifted’ programs, and a focus on opportunities for a bespoke education that popularized alternative forms of education, including charter schools, magnet schools and home-schooling. See Ann Robinson and Pamela R. Clinkenbeard, ‘History of Giftedness: Perspectives from the Past Presage Modern Scholarship’, in Steven I. Pfeiffer (ed.), *Handbook of Giftedness in Children: Psychoeducational Theory, Research, and Best Practices* (New York: Springer, 2008), pp.13-32; Joseph Murphy, *Homeschooling in America: Capturing and Assessing the Movement* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2012); Joseph Murphy and Catherine Dunn Shiffman, *Understanding and Assessing the Charter School Movement* (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 2002).

¹¹⁹ Roedell, W. C., ‘Vulnerabilities of Highly Gifted Children’, *Roeper Review: A Journal on Gifted Education*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1984), pp.127–130 (p.127).

to verify such claims'.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, the correlation between giftedness and mental illness remains a 'popular notion', perhaps since the increasing interest in gifted children in the late decades of the twentieth century has coincided with an empirical 'skyrocket[ing]' of depression and suicide amongst young people, regardless of giftedness.¹²¹

Regardless of accuracy to the lives of real children, then, we can note in the Prodigious Child a general connection between studiousness and social awkwardness or emotional maldevelopment. Partly this reflects the extent to which popular portrayals of child prodigies in American culture (like those listed above) tend to emphasize the coincidence of giftedness with social alienation, mental illness, and even neurodiversity, even if they seldom touch the facts of medical autism.¹²² More broadly, the Prodigious Child shows glimpses of the 'nerd' or 'geek', a broad archetype which Kathryn E. Lane has argued became visible in the '80s and '90s after the 1978 Saturday Night Live skit 'Nerd Rock' and the 1984 film *Revenge of the Nerds*.¹²³ Doubtless, the figure of the 'nerd' or the 'geek' is another result of an increasingly electronic youth culture, born out of 'society's implicit reliance on, and potential resentment of, technology', but it also refers to a subculture rooted in the consumption of comic books, fantasy roleplay and collectable toys that stretches back to the Golden Age of comics in the '40s and '50s.¹²⁴ The broad designation of the 'nerd/geek' thereby covers a gamut of differing identities (from academic wunderkinds to *Dungeons and Dragons* fanatics and arcade gamers), but the term is invoked here as an easy shorthand for the tendency to represent these children as being 'highly accomplished at technical or scientific pursuits', but 'inept, clumsy, [and] unattractive' in their social and emotional lives.¹²⁵ Though the bifurcation of 'nerds' and 'jocks' might seem only a trite legacy of '80s teen films like *The Breakfast Club* (1985) and *The Goonies* (1985), scholars of giftedness have written of the difficulty of 'finding an appropriate peer group or reaching acceptance within the

¹²⁰ Maureen Niehart, 'The impact of giftedness on psychological well-being: What does the empirical literature say?', *Roeper Review: A Journal on Gifted Education*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1999), pp.10-17 (p.16); and Jean A. Baker, 'Depression and suicidal ideation among academically talented adolescents', *Gifted Child Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (1995), pp.218-223.

¹²¹ Maureen Niehart, 'Gifted Children and Depression', in Niehart et al. (eds.), *The Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Children: What Do We Know?* (Washington, DC: Prufrock Press, 2002), pp.93-103 (p.93).

¹²² See Stuart Murray, *Representing Autism: Culture, Narrative, Fascination* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008); and Anthony D. Baker, 'Recognizing Jake: Contending with Formulaic and Spectacularized Representations of Autism in Film', in Mark Olsteen (ed.) *Autism and Representation* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), pp.229-43.

¹²³ See Kathryn E. Lane, 'How was the Nerd or Geek Born?', in Kathryn Lane (ed.) *Age of the Geek: Depictions of Nerds and Geeks in Popular Media* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), pp.1-20.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.13. See also Benjamin Woo, *Getting a Life: The Social Worlds of Geek Culture* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018).

¹²⁵ Woo, *Getting a Life*, pp.6-7.

desired group'.¹²⁶ Put simply, the children of this chapter tend to lack friends, and try to derive fulfilment instead from a library of books; the alienation of the 'nerdy' prodigy thereby makes it a perfect litmus test for how the proliferation of information made possible by new technologies does not always enrich one's social and emotional life.

Whilst postmodernist treatments of the 'child prodigy' tend to proliferate around the '80s and '90s, an important early archetype can be found in Don DeLillo's *Ratner's Star* (1976). The publication of this novel places it as an interesting point of transformation between the rebellious children of the long Sixties and the more complex world of childhood toward the end of the century; the same could be said of Gaddis' *JR* (1975), a satire of rabid American capitalism in which the unruly eponymous teenager is nevertheless the most adept at building a fraudulent business empire. Though Gaddis' novel prefigures the use of the child to signify some of the more grotesque tenets of American political life, young JR can hardly be said to be a 'prodigy' in the same way as DeLillo's 'Little Billy Twillig', a fourteen-year-old who is given 'the first Nobel Prize ever given in mathematics' for a theorem only 'understood by three or four people'.¹²⁷ Alongside this brilliance, the character is burdened by emotional trauma (having witnessed a deadly train accident as a child), experiences developmental difficulties (remaining mute until four years old), and displays a 'noncommittal [...] and generally listless manner' that perturbs adults who speak to him.¹²⁸ Such cursory connections between childhood brilliance and emotional maladjustment will become a common thread in the next decades, even if DeLillo's novel doesn't explore this thread in much detail. In actuality, the clash between complex mathematical theory and the immaturity of the protagonist yields a more straightforwardly comic novel than much of DeLillo's canon, which recapitulates the Pynchonian clash of 'childish' and 'adult' that defines much earlier postmodernism. The secret retreat in which Twillig spends much of the novel comes complete with a 'play maze', and houses scientists and academics who '[speak] to each other like small children', amid playing a 'meaningless formal game' called 'halfball', which combines 'elements of rounders, baseball, tag, cricket, one o' cat, stickball and children's verse'.¹²⁹ In a novel with much scepticism as to the epistemological stability and interpretative clarity of even mathematical logic, the figure of the child allows DeLillo to

¹²⁶ Steven I. Pfeiffer & Vicki B. Stocking, 'Vulnerabilities of Academically Gifted Students', *Special Services in the Schools*, Vol. 16: Nos. 1-2 (2000) pp.83-93 (p.87).

¹²⁷ Don DeLillo, *Ratner's Star* (London: Picador, 2016), p.4.

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp.4-5, 69, 75.

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp.113, 134, 328.

undercut the high seriousness of these scientists, averring that any act of expression or interpretation is just a form of ‘serious play’, with little claims to objective truth.

DeLillo’s irreverent repudiation of privileged interpretation, which has often been compared to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, bears clear similarities to the use of the child to offset moments of high seriousness in earlier writers. Being at once ‘childish’ and ‘adult’, the child prodigy seems particularly suited to this project, and DeLillo’s text here provides a key bridging point between the postmodernism of the ‘60s and that of the ‘90s. This is seen perhaps most clearly with the Enfield Tennis Academy in *Infinite Jest*, since it is ‘one of the very few extant sport academies that makes a real stab at being a genuine pre-college school’, most of its students show intellectual as well as sporting prowess.¹³⁰ Centrally, Wallace presents the game of Eschaton—a hideously ‘complicated children’s game’ that can be scored only by a thirteen-year-old ‘calculus phenom’—which devolves into a schoolyard brawl with over the Baudrillardian distinction of ‘map’ and ‘territory’.¹³¹ This clash of high theory and slapstick is typical of Wallace’s fiction, and shows perhaps the clearest lineage between the author and his ‘patriarchs’, despite his various rejections of postmodernism as a viable artistic framework in the 1990s.¹³² In one extended thread, Wallace explains the complex political machinations that birthed the Organization of North American Nations through a puppet show, and later we see a group of young E.T.A children called the ‘Tunnel Club’ whose ‘unifying raison d’être’ seems to be finding newer and more convoluted rules for membership.¹³³ Similar blends of the puerile and cerebral can be found in *The Broom of the System*; one plotline concerns a baby food that lets infants talk ‘years before they normally would have’, and in another, we see Patrice Beadsman lose a Bridge tournament to ‘two eight-year-old contract bridge prodigies who wear matching beanies with propellers on top’.¹³⁴ In each, the conceit of the ‘child genius’ makes his oftentimes dense encyclopaedic detail more palatable, and undercuts some of the narrative’s pretensions toward ‘serious fiction’ with juvenile humour.

As well as recalling the Animate Child in its depiction of an irreverent ‘childishness’, the prodigies seen in Wallace’s first two novels also follow the tendency toward unhappiness seen in

¹³⁰ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, pp.188.

¹³¹ Ibid., pp.322, 322-40.

¹³² See McCaffrey, ‘An Expanded Interview’, p.48.

¹³³ Ibid., pp.380-407, 667-9..

¹³⁴ Wallace, *Broom of the System*, pp.149, 264.

the Preterite Child, enacting a typically Wallacian entreaty toward empathy. Whilst *The Broom of the System* and *Infinite Jest* shows Lenore Beadsman and Hal Incandenza as disaffected young adults, Wallace roots their unhappiness in earlier youth; the ‘quite intelligent and thus accelerated’ Lenore and ‘lexical prodigy’ Hal are shown to have a history of emotional maldevelopment and social isolation, rooted primarily in their dysfunctional family life.¹³⁵ For Lenore’s part, she spends her childhood home-schooled in ‘an immense impregnable’ wing of their house by the strict governess Miss Malig, whilst her depressed mother wanders the grounds in ‘a flowing white cotton dress’.¹³⁶ In one of the first episodes of *Infinite Jest*, meanwhile, we see an analepsis to young Hal as a ‘continentally ranked junior tennis player who can also recite great chunks of the dictionary, verbatim’, conducting a ‘therapy’ session by his father in a shoddy disguise.¹³⁷ Ostensibly a staged opportunity to broach their awkward relationship, they are instead drawn to complex discussions of ‘Byzantine erotica’, and the semantics of the term ‘conversationalist’; such heady theory undercuts any opportunity for a serious emotional response (as when Hal tries to bring up his father’s alcoholism) and Hal’s end of the conversation retreats into silence when his father discloses his own unhappy childhood.¹³⁸ In both, Wallace implies that his children’s prodigiousness is ransomed by a healthy socioemotional life, and makes the central suggestion that intellectual acumen is often incompatible, or even a direct threat to, emotional articulacy and wellbeing. After all, the success of the Ennet Drug and Alcohol Recovery House at the heart of *Infinite Jest* rests on the importance of interpersonal ‘sharing’ in an atmosphere that resists attempts at over-intellectualization: Don Gately is told that the Twelve Step Program ‘just works, is all; end of story’.¹³⁹ Inasmuch as Ennet House forms the ‘mirror image’ of the Enfield Tennis Academy, as Heather Houser has argued, Wallace draws a close contrast between one institution where ‘feeling suffuses’ and another in which emotional vulnerability is expunged by the ‘machine-language’ of sporting prodigiousness.¹⁴⁰

Whilst Mark McGurl has convincingly argued that Wallace breaks from his forbears in viewing such institutions as a ‘communal antidote to atomism’ (rather than a site of hegemonic control), much of the empathetic connections between the E.T.A children still come in their

¹³⁵ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p.29; Wallace, *Broom of the System*, pp.3-4.

¹³⁶ Wallace, *Broom of the System*, p.263.

¹³⁷ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, pp.160, 27-9.

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp.27-31.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp.349-350.

¹⁴⁰ Heather Houser, *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and Affect* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p.150; Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p.118.

shared experiences of unhappiness and anxiety.¹⁴¹ Alongside the ‘nerdy’ awkwardness of young Hal Incandenza, who wears a bow-tie and ‘tends to get beat up’, we see ‘age seven, high I.Q.’ Tina Echt collapse in floods of tears at entering the Academy, ‘ten-year old Kent Blott’ left terrified of masturbation by his ‘Seventh-Day Adventist’ parents, and Todd Possalthwaite suffer ‘existential angst at age thirteen’ after his father reneges on a motivational promise.¹⁴² Importantly, Wallace implies that they suffer not only despite their prodigious talent, but *because* of it, especially since they are the victims of their parents’ unsettlingly high expectations. Inviting disparate connections between characters, the novel’s achronological structure also shows continuities with the past prodigiousness of Hal’s father, and a key analepsis to James Incandenza’s youth early in the novel mirrors Hal’s uncomfortable conversation with a parent:

I’m predicting it right here, young sir Jim. You are going to be a great tennis player. I was near-great. You will be truly great. You will be the real thing. I know I haven’t taught you to play yet, I know this is your first time, Jim, Jesus, relax, I know. It doesn’t affect my predictive sense. You will overshadow and obliterate me.¹⁴³

Like on ‘On His Deathbed’, the use of the second person lends the reader a child’s perspective during a private exchange—the result is uncomfortably intimate. One shares the implied distress of young James Incandenza at hearing his parent heap unrealistic expectations on him (‘young sir Jim’, ‘truly great’), especially as much of it seems to betray the father’s own failed dreams of sporting prodigiousness. This becomes clearer as the section continues, and Incandenza Sr’s cerebral account of the game of tennis gives way to a confession of existential angst, and a description of his career-ending injury as a boy.¹⁴⁴ James Incandenza Sr paints his injury as the result of his own parents’ neglect: in an ironic casual loop, his father’s proclamation that ‘[his son]’ll Never Be Great’ causes him to slip, and ruins his chances of genuine prodigiousness.¹⁴⁵

Such episodes of childhood trauma, which beset nearly every character in Wallace’s canon, provide a riposte to earlier visions of childhood’s simple joy. Especially for these prematurely gifted children, childhood instead represents a time of confusion and anxiety, and their obsessive pursuit of knowledge or talent seems a distraction from the more difficult realities of youth. Consequently, their bookish knowledge masks their emotional underdevelopment, and Wallace returns time and again to this conception of the Prodigious Child as one that is

¹⁴¹ McGurl, ‘The Institution of Nothing’, p.38.

¹⁴² Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, pp.519-24, 390, 1066-72, n.324.

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp.158.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.168.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.165-6.

unusually articulate in academic matters, but emotionally taciturn, often to the point of silence. In many cases, this combination of academic precocity and socioemotional reticence recalls what Stuart Murray has dubbed the ‘autist-savant’, referring to the popularity of the trope in the late ‘80s and ‘90s following the release of *Rain Man*.¹⁴⁶ Released the same year as the film, Wallace’s early story ‘Little Expressionless Animals’ presents a child prodigy named ‘Lunt’, who is described as being ‘autistic to where this was like a mannequin of a kid’.¹⁴⁷ Again, this manifests as a response to trauma: Lunt and his sister are first shown abandoned as children, but find solace in memorising Laplace’s Data Guide and playing with straightedges. Wallace’s depiction of the mechanical reproduction of information (like Hal’s memorisation of the dictionary) seems to place emphasis upon the ability to raw data without any meaningful import; the same could be said of Wallace’s later canon, in which the protagonist of ‘The Soul is not a Smithy’ can apparently ‘scan a page [...] and supply a certain amount of specific quantitative information, such as the exact number of words per page’ and one young character in *The Pale King* would ‘instead of reading something, count the words in it’.¹⁴⁸ Wallace here betrays the influence of the popular connection between giftedness and autism that becomes omnipresent in the later twentieth century, and shows his fidelity to the broader anxiety that the pressures of giftedness must necessarily result in, or be a result of, some kind of childhood maladjustment.

Whilst his tendency to rely upon disability as a tool of characterization bears clear problems (and plays into a poor understanding of the actual developmental disorder), the condition of being ‘autistic’ is clearly a shorthand for which Wallace was fond.¹⁴⁹ In the essay ‘Tense Present’ (later published as ‘Authority and American Usage’) he talks of an archetypal ‘skinny, carbuncular, semi-autistic Computer Nerd’, and in *Infinite Jest* Orin Incandenza describes his emotionally distant father as ‘so blankly and irretrievably hidden that [...] he’d come to see him as like autistic, almost catatonic’; Matt Tresco has even written of autism as a ‘narrative

¹⁴⁶ See Murray, *Representing Autism*, pp.65-70.

¹⁴⁷ David Foster Wallace, ‘Little Expressionless Animals’, in *Girl with Curious Hair* (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1989), pp.1-42 (p.20).

¹⁴⁸ David Foster Wallace, ‘The Soul is Not a Smithy’, in *Oblivion: Stories* (London: Abacus, 2014), pp.67-113 (p.72); Wallace, *Pale King*, p.162

¹⁴⁹ See David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000). Wallace’s tendency to describe characters in terms of physical difference and neurodiversity is a notable feature of his canon, and shows a tendency toward this ‘narrative prosthesis’, in which art relies upon disability as a blanket ‘device of characterization and interrogation’ (p.50). Though an account of disability in Wallace is beyond the scope of this thesis, his fiction—as well as the image of the ‘evil child’ or ‘child prodigy’ more generally—would benefit from the perspective of critical disability studies.

form' in *Infinite Jest*, inasmuch as the novel's emphasis upon communicative difficulty analogises the wider difficulty of parsing the huge novel's overload of information.¹⁵⁰ Like the depiction of Mario's various physical ailments, these depictions tend toward comic hyperbole than any real attempt to probe the experience of disability, but Wallace still follows the tendency of autism narratives to 'create a space, figured precisely of how the condition is perceived to function, that [...] reflects back upon the non-autistic world'.¹⁵¹ Simply put, the 'autistic' child prodigy seems a particularly egregious example of the wider experience of cultural solipsism that Wallace suggests has been exacerbated by the Information Age; in the information-saturated world of cable television and the early years of the Internet, Wallace seems to suggest that we too can receive a huge amount of information but are getting worse at understanding the larger meaning or affect that it carries. Like his prodigies' tendency to replace real human interaction with bookish knowledge, Wallace suggests that the response to this unhappiness consists of solitary consumption and narcissistic self-obsession, precluding the socioemotional connections which might allow some escape from, or empathetic recognition of, the afflicted 'inner' life of the postmodern subject.

Recalling the monstrous infants which roam the Great Concavity, this clash of 'adult' and 'child' is made to seem grotesque rather than humorous, an unsettling admixture of the harsher truths of 'adult' life and the communicative insularity of infancy. We might say, then, that Prodigious Child represents a space to explore anxieties about development, or maldevelopment—hence the prominence of characters in Wallace's oeuvre whose unhappiness is rooted in childhood trauma. Though Marshall Boswell has read *Infinite Jest* as a bildungsroman, we must surely characterize it similarly to the ironic inversions seen in the last chapter; Hal's narrative does not see him 'achieve narrative authority' or 'discover' his 'true' identity at all, but is concluded in a University interview described in the novel's first few pages, where his poor attempts to communicate his 'inner' life at a University interview finally collapse into a kind of 'locked-in' paralysis.¹⁵² Even if this kind of failure is a 'generative failure' that opens new possibilities to 'fail again and better', as Clare Hayes-Brady has argued, we should note here the

¹⁵⁰ David Foster Wallace, 'Tense Present: Democracy, English and the Wars over Usage', *Harper's Magazine* (April 2001), pp.39-58; *Infinite Jest*, p.737; see also Matt Tresco, 'Impervious to U.S. Parsing: Encyclopedism, Autism, and Infinite Jest', in *Consider David Foster Wallace*, pp.113-122 (p.116).

¹⁵¹ Murray, *Representing Autism*, p.13.

¹⁵² Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, pp.3-12; Anne T. Salvatore, 'Toni Morrison's New Bildungsromane: Paired Characters and Antithetical Form in *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *Beloved*', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp.154-178 (p.154). See also Boswell, *Understanding Wallace*, p.122.

tendency for young characters' maturation to be complicated or arrested, via a familiar positioning of the child prodigy as synonymous with emotional reticence and maldevelopment.¹⁵³ This becomes a thread in late postmodernism after Wallace, in which the child prodigy often appears as an unsettling admixture of 'adult' and 'childish' culture. Helen DeWitt's *The Last Samurai*, for instance, centres on a similarly dysfunctional family of prodigies as the Incandenzas, and charts the former prodigy Sibylla's strained attempts to raise the prodigy Ludo, first introduced as a 'two-year-old workaholic' who learned to count by 'count[ing] up to 5,557 over a period of three days before collapsing in sobs'.¹⁵⁴ Carole Maso's *Defiance* (1998) associates the young prodigy Bernadette with psychopathy, and the novel comes to us as a sprawling diary of her thoughts whilst awaiting execution for 'kill[ing] with great deliberation, in the full surge of my sanity, two lovely young men'.¹⁵⁵ Percival Everett's *Ghlyph* (1999), meanwhile, centres on a different kind of 'locked in' genius—the narrative appears as the work of a four-year-old genius Ralph, narrating in the first person his past life as a baby inexplicably born with a genius IQ and love of reading.

Key to these depictions is a typically postmodernist challenge to what Lyotard called the 'status of knowledge', which recalls both the irreverent spirit of early postmodernism and the Foucauldian entanglements of knowledge and power seen in the previous chapter.¹⁵⁶ On the former, we should note the comic admixture of complex theory and 'childishness' familiar from Ratner's *Star* and *Infinite Jest*, which seems a key lineage between early and late postmodernists. The deeply intertextual *The Last Samurai*, for instance, apposes the works of J.S. Mill and the *Odyssey* to *The House at Pooh Corner* in Ludo's sprawling reading lists, and in early chapters intersperses infantile temper tantrums into Sibylla's narration ('NOOOOOOOOOOOO', 'WHY DON'T YOU TEACH ME THE SYLLABARIES'), echoing the unsettling polyphony of Gaddis' *JR*. Everett's novel similarly apposes bizarre diagrams and complex terminology hewn from linguistic theory to the prodigy Ralph's more childish bents; being less than a year old, 'books and nipples' are his two passions, and though he knows complex linguistics he still cannot speak or 'completely control [his] waste functions', so that he has to learn to read Lacan whilst simultaneously attempting to do 'a poopy in the potty'.¹⁵⁷ Both thereby use the child prodigy to

¹⁵³ Hayes-Brady, *Unspeakable Failures*, p.5.

¹⁵⁴ Helen DeWitt, *The Last Samurai* (London: Vintage, 2018), pp.41, 44.

¹⁵⁵ Carole Maso, *Defiance* (New York, London: Plume, 1998), p.5.

¹⁵⁶ See Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.3.

¹⁵⁷ Percival Everett, *Ghlyph* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 1999), pp.9, 76, 164.

cast a satirical eye toward the pretensions of bookish knowledge, particularly in reference to a ranging Western canon and a backdrop of hoary institutions and stuffy academics. In *Glyph*, baby Ralph's father 'Inflato' (as nicknamed by his son) appears as a narcissistic University professor more interested in social climbing than attending to his family, and he barely notices his child has a genius-level IQ at only a few months old.¹⁵⁸ Everett's lampooning of a fustian and self-indulgent academic world—which includes a fictionalized version of a lecherous Roland Barthes—informs a wider iconoclastic urge toward writers and philosophers lionized by this world; the child dismisses Byron and Rousseau as 'pathetic and artless', and imagines a disparate array of historical figures (from Socrates to Balzac) engage each other in self-circulating arguments.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, Ludo's solipsistic quest for knowledge provides an ugly reflection of the 'great men' who have left his mother to raise a child alone, a connection made explicit in the second half of the novel, in which Ludo quests to find his true father from a disparate assembly of celebrity intellectuals. Rejecting each prospective 'father' on the basis that they are not intelligent enough, emotionally compromised, and simply not 'heroic' enough, Ludo ultimately remains searching by the end of the novel, seeking 'chances to proclaim [him]self the son of the Danish ambassador', or 'the son of a Belgian attaché'.¹⁶⁰

In addition to these attempts to undercut moments of high seriousness with low or bathetic humour, their challenge to the knowledge consumed by the child prodigy often shows a closer eye to the racialized and gendered implications of this knowledge. Of particular interest here are Everett's presentations of Aristophanes and Ralph Ellison talking about 'colour', and Socrates and James Baldwin discussing writing; the incommensurability of their experience, and the particulars of cultural context, defy the universalist ambitions of Classical philosophers.¹⁶¹ Though *Glyph* is seldom concerned with questions of race, Ralph does point out that the hypothetical, universal or 'colour-less' subject tends to be synonymous with whiteness:

Have you to this point assumed I'm white? In my reading, I discovered that if a character was black, then he at some point was required to comb his Afro hairdo, speak on the street using an obvious, ethnically identifiable idiom [...] White characters, I assumed they were white (often,

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, pp.6.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.89.

¹⁶⁰ DeWitt, *Last Samurai*, p.431.

¹⁶¹ Everett, *Glyph*, pp.78-9, 100-1.

because of the ways they spoke of other kinds of people), did not seem to need that kind of introduction, or perhaps legitimization, to exist on the page.¹⁶²

Baby Ralph's shrewd assessment of the normatively white subject recalls Bambara and Morrison in its use of a child's perspective to register incredulity toward the ideological biases of American culture. Particularly as Ralph is apparently not waylaid by any of these biases—almost everything here is encountered new through an infant's eyes—his narration allows Everett to provide a caustic assessment of the contingencies underlying canonized knowledge and the affectations of academics like Ralph's father, whose euphuism rests upon privileges it simultaneously aims to abstract. These privileges come to the fore in *The Last Samurai*, in which Sibylla's determination to nurture her son's prodigiousness is often frustrated by the realities of raising a child with no support system or stable employment; Sibylla calculates that she will have to raise Ludo on '55p a day' to make rent, and fears that she will have to 'stretch out the £22.62 [she has] in the house' to buy food.¹⁶³ Particularly given her daily confrontation with the belief that, 'in the absence of a benevolent male, the single mother faces an uphill battle in raising her son', there is a feminist logic to a novel that juxtaposes Sibylla's struggles with Ludo's abrasive and tumultuous intellect.¹⁶⁴ Recalling Acker, the novel's disjointed style not only communicates the breadth of Sibylla's reading but her unquiet inner life, and she undercuts the epistemological authority of patriarchy with a cast of misogynistic potential 'fathers', all of whom fall short of Ludo's idealized notions of a hyperrational, masculine intellect.

The sense that the prodigy's knowledge merely consists of the consumption of 'old, dead white men' (as Laura Lyn Inglis and Peter K. Steinfeld have it), and that this knowledge bolsters the privilege of educated white men in the present, is brought to the fore in Carole Maso's *Defiance* (1999).¹⁶⁵ Like *The Last Samurai*, Maso gestures to the contingencies underlying prodigious knowledge via a focus on the prodigy Bernadette's working mother, who has to hide Bernadette under the table at her full-time job for lack of childcare. Whilst the novel thereby finds in the prodigy a familiar clash of 'childish' and 'adult' worlds, Maso recalls less the irreverence of the Animate Child than the bleak comitragedy of the Preterite Child; Bernadette's memories of watching her mother repeatedly molested by her employer are interspersed with

¹⁶² Ibid., p.54.

¹⁶³ DeWitt, *Last Samurai*, pp.41-2, 73.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p.26.

¹⁶⁵ Laura Lynn Inglis and Peter Klaus Steinfeld, *Old Dead White Men's Philosophy* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2000).

nursery rhymes, and she herself is molested by her brother at age seven.¹⁶⁶ This upbringing strengthens the familiar connection between prodigiousness and trauma, in that her teenage years spent reading are depicted as a means by which to escape her unhappy inner life, and a money-making exercise for her exploitative father, who parades her ‘at county fairs, at local radio shows, at libraries [...] to solve problems of mathematics in [her] head, recite Latin, spew off world capitals’.¹⁶⁷ The gendered implications of this exploitation are made clear when she is accepted to Harvard as an early adolescent, and finds her intelligence is still predominantly in the service of men; female students are ‘ridiculed, maimed, chewed up and discarded’, to make room for those ‘sweet phallogocentrics’ who ‘quested after pleasure, power, and above all knowledge’.¹⁶⁸ Her ironic repudiation of ‘the arrogance of the gifted male child’ ranges over both her condescending academic peers, and the ‘filthy rich, Harvard kid[s]’, who, having been ‘geeks their whole lives’, now descend upon University a crowd of ‘needy, oversexed, crowing adolescents’.¹⁶⁹ The collapsing of the nascent ‘geek’ archetype and hoary institutions like Harvard shows a longer lineage to a culture in which ‘knowledge [is] the main arbiter of value’, and defined as being ‘oppositional to femininity’, as Salter and Blodgett have it; for them, the hypermasculine geek can be understood within a broader tendency to preserve knowledge as a masculine domain apart from the domestic and emotional labour of women.¹⁷⁰ Bernadette herself comes to reflect that her obsession with learning was as much about ‘having bought into the patriarchy big time—its narratives, its mathematics, its God, [...] Harvard, the image of the godhead on earth’—and her desire to slaughter her arrogant students is rendered, through her mind at least, less as an irrational legacy of her traumatic childhood than a calculated attempt to undermine a male claim to authoritative knowledge.¹⁷¹

The dark humour at the heart of the novel, which is presented as a sprawling ‘anti-narrative’ of Bernadette’s tormented inner life as she recounts her acts of murder, should remind us that these depictions’ debts to earlier postmodernists do not tend to recapitulate a sympathetic portrayal of the child.¹⁷² Bernadette senses a ‘darker resident, [a] tougher, more resilient [...]

¹⁶⁶ Maso, *Defiance*, pp.11-12.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p.98.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pp.79, 100, 140.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.79-80.

¹⁷⁰ Anastasia Salter and Bridgett Blodgett, *Toxic Geek Masculinity in Media: Sexism, Trolling, and Identity Policing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), pp.35-6.

¹⁷¹ Maso, *Defiance*, p.233.

¹⁷² Robin Silbergreif, ‘Speaking (in) the Silences: Gender and Anti-Narrative in Carole Maso’s *Defiance*’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Fall 2010), pp. 331-349 (p.332).

diabolical sister' growing within her during her unhappy childhood, and subsequently becomes 'Lizzie [Borden] 2, [...] the Hatchet Woman of Harvard' in the eyes of tabloid newspapers after her crimes.¹⁷³ Similarly, the inexplicably genius baby Ralph is viewed by turns as 'possessed', a 'freak', and a 'devil-child', and most of *Glyph*'s plot hinges upon various attempts to abduct or destroy the child, pastiching a familiar 'branch of gifted narratives [that] imagines the child to be coveted by irresponsible self-serving agencies'.¹⁷⁴ Ludo's premature uptake of 'adult' knowledge, meanwhile, comes hand in hand with much of the same emotional maldevelopment as the Wallacian child; in early chapters Ludo cannot understand why he is being encouraged to become a 'co-operative member of the class' instead of smuggling his own books into class, and when his schoolteacher brings up the tendency for child prodigies to have 'trouble adjusting to their peers' he scoffs that 'La formule est banale'.¹⁷⁵ This lack of emotional intelligence becomes even clearer in the second half of the novel, which consists mostly of Ludo's narration from the ages of about six to eleven. DeWitt's use of a childish register (reporting blocks of 'I said/She said' dialogue with little further detail) draws comic attention to the disparity between his spartan style and the intrusion of complex jargon, but also to Ludo's unsettlingly affectless interpretation of events narrated. His lack of empathy leaves him cold to Sibylla in particular; he wonders 'what's the use of being so miserable' and reflects that he 'should be sympathetic but [...] was too impatient', desiring instead a mother who was 'wild and daring' like his prospective 'fathers'.¹⁷⁶ As well as testifying to the impossible standards Ludo has gleaned from a lifetime of reading, the boy's oftentimes mechanical and utilitarian interpretation of human behaviour—which again often seems close to the popular vernacular of the autist-savant—leave him unable to him relate to those who fall short of his intellectual precocity, with whom he cannot 'fight with real swords'.¹⁷⁷

In all of these depictions, the Prodigious Child's obsessive pursuit of knowledge at the ransom of human contact shows key overlaps with the Wallacian child. Like the Incandenzas, the prodigy's bountiful knowledge is matched by an inverse inability, or unwillingness, to speak to others: after her sexual molestation Bernadette becomes 'an elective mute for some years', and Ralph communicates to other characters only by written notes, since he apparently knows how

¹⁷³ Maso, *Defiance*, pp.22, 24.

¹⁷⁴ Everett, *Glyph*, pp.26, 154, 180; Renner, *Evil Child in the Popular Imagination*, p.10.

¹⁷⁵ DeWitt, *Last Samurai*, pp.204, 210.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.409.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.280.

to speak, but ‘does not like the sound of it’.¹⁷⁸ Their attempts to understand the world around them, and to make sense of their turbulent ‘inner’ life, are instead represented in mathematical and philosophical equations, and digressions into complex theory which frustrate any attempt at linear narrative. Again, this can yield a humorous clash of different registers, but also an unsettling glimpse at their emotional immaturity; Bernadette’s inability to solve why ‘everything [...] hurts’ with algebraic functions, for instance, both betrays a mechanical approach to human emotion that recalls Ludo, and acts a humorously bathetic riposte to prodigious knowledge.¹⁷⁹ Essentially, the status of this knowledge is repudiated not only on the basis that it is elitist, or that it implicitly privileges certain values and interpretations, but that it is pragmatically useless, especially in socioemotional terms. Whereas as a child Bernadette ‘believed intelligence to be immortal’, her unhappy life and ignominious arrest show her mechanical and dispassionate grasp of information only to make her a better killer; likewise, Sibylla’s past as a prodigy leaves her unhappy and alone, and her narration is constantly interrupted by ‘The Alien’, an imagined creature ‘with a long eel-neck and little reptilian eyes’ that ‘finds specious reasons for cruelty’ in recalling her limitations.¹⁸⁰ Everett’s use of an infant protagonist in *Glyph* not only allows him to humorously undercut the pretensions of bookish knowledge, but also to demonstrate Ralph’s intelligence is fairly useless in conjunction with the inability to move himself or grasp objects. The movement of *Glyph*’s plot ultimately suggests that mastery of knowledge through a world of books does very little good to help Ralph in a ‘real’ world beset by abductions and imprisonment, and in the end, it is not his intelligence but his loving mother who saves him. *Glyph* thereby takes on a surprisingly Wallacian quality in its emphasis of human connection over prodigious knowledge; the coda to the novel shows Ralph to be living a much happier and more sedate life by hiding his prodigiousness and engaging in more typically childish pursuits with his loving mother.

The novel’s sudden turn toward an idyllic vision of childhood, having stripped itself of the language games that have marked its plot thus far, should again remind us that late postmodernism was as much in dialogue with early postmodernism as these writers were with high modernism. Even though *Glyph* is, in many ways, an archetypal postmodernist text that undermines ‘any possibility of linearity, continuity, cause/effect relationships, and correlations of

¹⁷⁸ Maso, *Defiance*, p.59; Everett, *Glyph*, p.8.

¹⁷⁹ Maso, *Defiance*, p.210.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p.232; DeWitt, *The Last Samurai*, pp.45-6, 100-1.

signification', it also shows outright scorn toward postmodernist and poststructuralist thought.¹⁸¹ Ralph's father 'Inflato' is identified as a 'poststructuralist' and Ralph dismisses *The Crying of Lot 49* as a book that merely 'put [him] to sleep', whilst each chapter is haphazardly plastered with fashionable jargon like 'différance', 'pharmakon' and 'simulacrum'.¹⁸² In Ralph's attempt to understand the 'chicken-egg' question of whether 'humans invented language' or 'language invented humans', he eventually opines that he is 'sick of the whole mess'; the child-narrator ends with the recognition that 'all I can do is give my text a helmet and a condom and send it out into the world'.¹⁸³ The novel does not thereby seem to reject the sceptical posture of postmodernism outright—Ralph admits that, 'after Hiroshima, Auschwitz, and Blood River, [...] there are no safe meanings'—but tempers it with a pragmatic recognition that authors might be better suited worrying about 'storiemes' than 'semes', and that the energy expended in self-circulating arguments about the relation between signifier and referent might be better directed elsewhere.¹⁸⁴ Bernadette's violence against young male prodigies in *Defiance*, meanwhile, coincides with much of Maso's dismissal of contemporary 'so-called new male innovators' (of whom only Mark Leyner is named) for a perceived lack of literary imagination and masturbatory encyclopedism; from this standpoint, *Defiance's* mockery of young male prodigies seems an attempt to take stock of Maso's own position in the American literary landscape, rebuffing associations with writers who 'fear the future' and 'fear the television'.¹⁸⁵ Whilst she does show some sympathy toward a previous generation of 'innovative male writers like Pynchon, Coover, and Barth', this 'postmodernist' canon blurs into a longer lineage of 'experimental' twentieth century literature centred predominantly upon a canon of white, educated men, and seems to present for Maso little opportunity for a serious feminist intervention.¹⁸⁶

From this standpoint, the more unsympathetic notes toward the 'child prodigy' seem to undermine not only the pretensions of canonized knowledge, but the writerly logic of postmodernism, since the prodigy seems an extreme illustration of the privileging of theoretical

¹⁸¹ Judith Roof, 'Everett's Hypernarrator', *Canadian Review of American Studies*, Vol. 43, No.2 (2013), pp.202-15 (p.203); see also Michael Feith, 'Hire-a-Glyph: Hermetics and Hermeunetics in Percival Everett's Glyph', *Canadian Review of American Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2013), pp.301-19.

¹⁸² Everett, *Glyph*, pp.6, 89, 113.

¹⁸³ Ibid., pp.155, 168, 203.

¹⁸⁴ See Ibid., pp.194-200.

¹⁸⁵ Stephen Moore, 'A Conversation with Carole Maso', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Fall 1994), pp.186-91 (pp.187-8); Carole Maso, 'Rupture, Verge, and Precipice/Precipice, Verge, and Hurt Not', in *Break Every Rule: Essays on Longing, Language, and Moments of Desire* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2000), pp.161-91 (pp.161-2).

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p.187.

knowledge *sans* engagement with social, emotional or political spheres. In the case of Hal, Lunt, Ludo, Bernadette and Ralph, the prodigious uptake of knowledge—predominantly gleaned from books—nevertheless leaves them ill-equipped to deal with more quotidian problems, and causes their emotional maldevelopment as they grow out of childhood. As well as betraying the influence of a popular iconography of prodigies as unsettling, unhappy or emotionally illiterate (an iconography which itself intersects with academic interest in the psychological constitution of giftedness), we see obvious relevance to their derisive vision of postmodernist literature as little more than a collection of self-contained language games and explorations in literary form. In *Defiance* and *Glyph*, the mockery of male Harvard students and pompous white academics also implies that the key texts of literary and philosophical postmodernism often merely recapitulate stock tropes and stereotypes with an ironic inflection added, or fail to account for existing cultural hegemonies; the primarily linguistic scope of these works, like the tendency of the child prodigy to isolate themselves in a world of books, is seen to deflect from real concerns in a way liable to fortify existing structures of privilege. Though I agree with McHale that such texts may not represent a ‘concrete breaking through to the post-post[modernist]’, works of late postmodernism here provide a valuable vantage point from which to reflect upon early postmodernism at the moment it is being canonized.¹⁸⁷ Whilst the logic of postmodernism is seen to remain useful for a continued urge toward deconstruction and suitable incredulity toward metanarratives, these texts ultimately underlie the fact that the survival of ‘postmodernist’ as a tool of descriptive utility depends on an apprehension of the way these concerns intersect with the more pragmatic concerns of American social and political life, or fail to do so.

The Prodigious Child, or, The Disappearance of Childhood?

In 1983, Letty C. Pogrebin wrote an article entitled ‘Do Americans Hate Children?’, in which she averred that, despite ‘kneel[ing] before the commercial altar of childhood in the adorable forms of Strawberry Shortcake, Peter Pan [...] and Annie’, America remained ‘a nation fundamentally ambivalent about its children’.¹⁸⁸ Similar arguments are to be found in Joe Kincheloe’s ‘The New Childhood’ (1997) and of course Postman’s *The Disappearance of Childhood*; Kincheloe posits a ‘virtual ubiquity of parent-child alienation’ in the 1980s, and Postman points to the rising divorce rate and shrinking American household that ‘the special status, image, and aura of the child has

¹⁸⁷ Brian McHale, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.126.

¹⁸⁸ Letty C. Pogrebin, ‘Do Americans Hate Children?’, in *Ms. Magazine* (November 1983), pp.47-50 (p.47).

been drastically diminished'.¹⁸⁹ Such thoughts should recall the disaffection of the Animate Child, and the tendency toward abuse marking the Preterite Child, and we should certainly note that the unstable relationship between adults and children in these chapters continues here. Despite these points of continuance, however, it is perceptible in the '80s and '90s that the idealization of the child often found in previous chapters has been radically transformed. By the technologized and mediatized childhoods of the late twentieth century, the Romantic roots of the Animate Child can no longer be maintained; rather than a redemptive return to nature, youth is seen instead at the bleeding edge of new technologies and cultural forms alien even to adults. Equally, although this oftentimes hostile world shows significant slippage with the 'adult' forces that beset the Preterite Child, the Prodigious Child seems less a victim co-opted by the forces of capital and high technology than a product created by this world. As much as the child can still be seen as an object of admiration or pity, we also see childhood as the site of considerable fear and unease in a way that complicates the attempt to read children with the same broadly sympathetic bent of the previous chapters.

At the heart of these changes lie anxieties about childhood development and maturation. Seen in works by Pynchon, DeLillo and Wallace, the Prodigious Child shows concern for the increasing liminality between adult and child culture, and these authors register alarm for the child's access to a corrupting 'adult' culture and ambivalence toward an increasingly 'childish' culture more broadly. Wallace's depiction of monstrous infants the size of grown men represents the convergence of the adult and the child as a physical aberration of human development, and his depiction of the child prodigy consonantly represents the child's uptake of adult knowledge as an indication of mental illness. The prodigious knowledge of the gifted child, therefore, tends to blur into a kind of developmental disorder, and these texts lean heavily on a popular vernacular of the 'gifted child' that equates their precociousness with neurodiversity or unhappiness. Though their depiction of the prodigy's unhappy and rigorous learning regime does inspire some sympathy for these 'children without childhood' (in the terms of Winn), the figure of the child prodigy also seems an attempt to seriously recalibrate the currency put on the uptake of knowledge, which here seems almost axiomatically opposed to a healthy socioemotional life. For one, the biases underlying this knowledge may be ripe to question, and Maso, DeWitt and Everett gesture (in a similar way to Morrison and Acker) to the cultural contingencies behind

¹⁸⁹ Joe Kincheloe, 'The New Childhood: Home Alone as a Way of Life', in *Key Works in Critical Pedagogy* (Rotterdam: Sense, 2011), pp.129-47 (p.133); Postman, *Disappearance of Childhood*, p.136.

ossified structures of power/knowledge. Particularly since the stories of Ludo, Ralph and Bernadette centre upon well-worn canons of Western philosophy and literature, and hoary institutions like Oxford and Harvard, the ultimate futility of their quest for knowledge reveals a challenge to this knowledge as culturally located and materially contingent. In a more general sense, placing too great a value upon private study only works to isolate these characters from social contact, and it is here that we glimpse of the emphasis upon ‘sincerity’ that critics have long emphasised of this transformative phase of postmodernism. The solipsistic pursuit of knowledge that defines the child prodigy proves a fertile metaphor for a millennial culture of atomized consumers, with unprecedented access to information through television and the early years of the Internet, but waning opportunities for genuine human contact or empathy.

These concerns are both timely, and prescient. Works by writers like Winn and Postman show that the increasing ubiquity of television had long been proclaimed as a death knell to family life, and it is striking to see the extent to which this phase of postmodernism intersects with those generally conservative voices proclaiming the decline of the American family. In this sense, child characters provide an entry-point to explore an increasingly dysfunctional home life, and represent a particularly extreme example of Wallace’s culture of ‘one way watching’;¹⁹⁰ children appear as the preeminent consumers of television, and child culture is positioned as one of the more obvious instances in which art or entertainment acts as an overt invitation toward consumption. Again, children thereby seem not only ‘victims’ of this culture, but some of its keenest proponents, particularly since they tend to appear in white, middle-class suburban households, with the economic comfort to participate fully in the new consumer imperatives of American life. Indeed, the form of the ‘child prodigy’ gives us perhaps the ideal neoliberal subject: as well as their imperative toward consumption (of books, art, and information of all kinds), their attempt at ‘prodigiousness’ shows them ‘languishing through [the] excessive demands of productivity’ that a neoliberal market-driven society demands.¹⁹¹ Since this emphasis upon productivity tends to locate success as a result of personal exceptionalism instead of structural or historical privilege, we see their precocious ‘adult’ qualities primarily located in their own efforts and self-sufficiency.¹⁹² The equation of ‘adult’ with productivity and self-

¹⁹⁰ Wallace, ‘E Unibus Pluram’, p.22.

¹⁹¹ David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *The Biopolitics of Disability: Neoliberalism, Ablenationalism and Peripheral Embodiment* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), p.40. See also

¹⁹² Much scholarship has emphasized the implicit whiteness of the ideal neoliberal subject, for instance, since neoliberalism ‘places a premium on consumer choice and deflects the racial privilege of whiteness as an outcome of personal achievement’. Amina Mire, *Wellness in Whiteness: Biomedicalization and the Promotion of*

sufficiency—particularly in terms of a working career, as in the case of the ETA and Bernadette’s premature entry into academia—will become an important thread in the next chapter, in which the ‘childish’ adult is often defined by their financial precarity and lack of employability. Once again, the ‘adult’ confluence with childhood is usually presented as an aberration, hence the unhappiness and maladjustment that runs through most of these child prodigies, and the dysfunction that characterizes the Gladney and Incandenza families. Whilst this latent unhappiness presents a parodic challenge to fictions of the ‘traditional American family’ (who are seen as far less well-adjusted than politicians might have us believe) it also depicts American society as an increasingly atomized collection of workers and consumers, which tends to beget loneliness, solipsism, and selfishness.¹⁹³

Authors’ fear that this ‘hyperreal’ consumer culture may foster emotional maladjustment seems very much of its time, but also looks forward to concerns that have defined discourse around children in the early 2000s and 2010s. The multitude of screens in children’s lives has only increased, bringing with it increasing fears of children’s access to ‘adult’ content, and substitution of face-to-face social contact with social media and gaming.¹⁹⁴ Although empirical studies have again questioned the blanket association of screen time with socioemotional maldevelopment, surveys have also shown that American children are reporting more unhappiness, and studies in the ‘90s and 2000s have suggested that reports of depression in children and adolescents ‘are at an all-time high and climbing’.¹⁹⁵ School shootings, joked about by DeLillo in *White Noise*, have seen a ‘strong increase [...] in the 1990s’ and ‘again after 2000’, and the twelve deadliest shootings in the country’s history have taken place since the turn of the new millennium.¹⁹⁶ Clearly, if the works in this chapter betray fears that there is something wrong with America’s children, those fears have been little assuaged in the decades that have followed:

Whiteness and Youth Amongst Women (New York and London: Routledge, 2020), p.59. See also Shona Hunter, *Power, Politics and the Emotions: Impossible Governance?* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), p.11; the fifth chapter of Joe R. Fegin, *The White Racial Frame* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013); and Zachary A. Casey, *A Pedagogy of Anticapitalist Antiracism: Whiteness, Neoliberalism, and Resistance in Education* (New York: SUNY Press, 2016).

¹⁹³ Ibid., p.49.

¹⁹⁴ See Sonia Livingstone and Leslie Haddon (eds.), *Kids Online: Opportunities and Risks for Children* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2009); and Vebjørn Tingstad, ‘Researching Children in a Digital Age: Theoretical Perspectives and Observations from the Field’, in Russell W. Belk and Rosa Llamas (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Digital Consumption* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp.113-23.

¹⁹⁵ Niehart, ‘Gifted Children and Depression’, p.93; see also Harold S. Koplewicz and Emily Klaas (eds.), *Depression in Children and Adolescents* (London: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁹⁶ Nils Böckler et al, ‘School Shootings: Conceptual Framework and International Empirical Trends’, in Nils Böckler et al (eds.), *School Shootings: International Research, Case Studies, and Concepts for Prevention* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), pp.1-25 (p.9).

the unsettling or maladjusted child seen in DeLillo and Wallace looks ahead to works like Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003), and the lonely or 'geeky' child prodigy is recapitulated in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), and Reif Larsen's *The Selected Works of T.J. Spivet* (2010). Elsewhere, late postmodernists' recognition of a sprawling child culture centred around television represent both the legacy of the '80s children's toy market boom and the transitional point toward what Cart and Bernstein have called 'a renaissance of youth culture in [America]' in the '90s and 2000s,¹⁹⁷ citing the growing population of teenagers in the late nineties, the popularisation of Young Adult fiction, and an 'increasingly single-minded focus on teens' in TV shows.¹⁹⁸ As these authors suggest, this 'youth culture' was again primarily focused upon adolescence, and very much grew out of patterns that can be traced at least to the '80s, but many of these trends in the '90s and 2000s encompassed a younger audience, like the ubiquitous *Pokémon* (eventually parodied by Pynchon in *Bleeding Edge*) and a 'cartoon renaissance' brought about by the formation of Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network.¹⁹⁹ Late postmodernists' allusions to the growing visibility of 'geek' and 'nerd' culture foretell the mainstreaming of geek culture in the coming decades.²⁰⁰ The iconography of superhero comics, fantasy, and science fiction have become hegemonic not only in youth culture, but American culture at large; the migration of these cultural forms originally associated with youth to the culture at large remains not only a clear indicator of the particularly porous nature of 'adult' and 'child' culture in the present day, but can be understood within broader trends that stretch back to the very earliest iterations of postmodernism.

As will be seen in the next chapter, this late phase of postmodernist literature thereby provides a useful vantage point to view 'postmodernism' as a whole. For one, clear points of continuity are found; the child prodigy, for instance, indulges the same comic juxtapositions of the 'adult' and 'childish' that defines postmodernist literature from the '50s and '60s, and therein provides a similarly irreverent challenge to the status of knowledge. The bathetic repudiation of a coherent 'knowing' that we find in *Glyph* or *The Last Samurai* recall the aimless epistemological

¹⁹⁷ Elizabeth Don't Throw the Small Ones Back', *Publisher's Weekly* (November 18, 1996), p.25; see also Michael Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2010), p.68.

¹⁹⁸ See *ibid.*, pp.68-9.

¹⁹⁹ Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), p.91.

²⁰⁰ See Woo, *Getting a Life*, pp.121-5.

quests of *V.* and *The Recognitions*, and one could compare the developmental challenges seen in late postmodernism to the frustrated quest narratives of early postmodernism. More broadly, their ironic repudiation of a simulacral consumer culture should remind us that, as Brian McHale notes, the logic of ‘postmodernism seemed [...] to come into its own in the decade’;²⁰¹ works by Fukuyama and Jameson proclaimed the postmodern condition to have become ubiquitous through the spread of consumer capitalism, and the ‘new technologies of the decade [...] seemed perfectly to complement its aesthetics’ in their ability to meld disorientating quantities of disparate information.²⁰² As much as Wallace’s ‘E Unibus Pluram’ can be understood as the harbinger of subsequent developments after postmodernism, it should also remind us that the American culture of the nineties was a time in which many of the techniques of early postmodernism has dissipated into a mainstream of television shows and commercials, and a self-aware irony had become the *lingua franca* of American popular culture. Understood alongside the work of Jameson, Fukuyama and Huyssen, this phase of late postmodernism can be seen as a reflection of the ‘postmodern condition’ in American life, and an attempt to take stock of what ‘postmodernism’ is or was as it reaches hegemonic proportions in the culture.

This is not to say that these works are straightforwardly affirmative in their relationship with ‘postmodernism’, and many represent an open challenge to the term. Wallace’s canon repudiates a broad cultural cynicism hewn from postmodernist irony; Everett mocks the linguistic ‘play’ of poststructuralist theory as a fustian abstraction; and Maso alludes to the hypocrisy of a postmodernist canon that professes a love of pluralism and the popular, but comes to a reader as a catalogue of complicated novels by educated white men. In truth, their understanding of ‘postmodernism’ touches mostly the phase that I have called ‘early postmodernism’, and the novels which birthed this generation of late postmodernists during their canonization in the ‘80s. Be that as it may, their ‘patricid[al]’ rebellions against authors like Pynchon, Burroughs and Barth are illuminating, even as they smooth out the complexities of their forbears; the familiar notion that metafiction in the ‘90s pivots from ‘irony’ to ‘sincerity’ does allude to these fictions’ tendency to emphasise the complex internal landscape of characters in a way that seems incompatible with the Foucauldian notion of subjects made from without. Hal, Ralph, Ludo, and Bernadette appear to us as variously ‘locked in’ within their own minds, and the first-person narration of these characters centres their psychological condition in a way

²⁰¹ McHale, *Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism*, pp.126-7.

²⁰² Ibid.

that contrasts the tendency in early postmodernism to draw upon the omniscient narration of Menippean satire, the picaresque, and fairy tales—even in a simple sense, texts of earlier postmodernism do not tend to have child narrators or focalisers. Though the novels treated in this chapter indulge in moments of black humour, they also treat their characters' unhappiness with a great deal more reverence than much early postmodernism, using the intimacy of their protagonists' narration (especially when it comes to us in diary form, as in *The Last Samurai* and *Defiance*) to create pathways of empathy. Though most acknowledge themselves as artifice in some way, they very clearly repudiate the play of language for language's sake (just as they repudiate the acquisition of knowledge for knowledge's sake), and place emphasis upon the importance of literature as a means to find, as Wallace has it, 'imaginative access to other selves'.²⁰³

The fact that these 'other selves' are so often children is telling. As mentioned, the child does appear partly as a particularly clear example of American culture at the end of the century, and their more childish bents make the novels' dense encyclopaedic detail more palatable. More than this, however, these authors' use of child protagonist recognizes the increasingly central position that youth holds within an American consumer culture; whilst inherited from the 'youthquake' amid which these authors grew up, it appears to us in an increasingly corporatized form consonant with developments in the '80s. By the '90s, Wallace emphasises the extent to which the single-minded focus on 'rebellious youth culture' has turned the whole consumer marketplace into an essentially 'childish' culture, promising limitless fun and positing different types of consumption as an irreverent challenge to authority.²⁰⁴ Recalling cultural commentators like Christopher Lasch, this account of American degeneration runs throughout DeLillo's depiction of the Gladney children as ideal consumers, and the obsessive pleasure-seeking culture of *Infinite Jest*, both of which centre upon a more deleterious form of 'childishness' than previous chapters—after all, the titular film's invitation toward infancy is revealed to be deadly. Wallace's repudiation of childish pleasure hints toward how 'childishness' erodes the ascetic traits that he associates with responsible adulthood; part of his novels' fear of maldevelopment lays in the fear that, even as these child prodigies may be prematurely 'adult' in their bookish knowledge, their emotional life will remain essentially regressive as they grow beyond childhood. Here we begin to see that the convergence of 'adult' and 'child' seen in the Prodigious Child hints toward its

²⁰³ McCaffrey, 'An Expanded Interview', p.22.

²⁰⁴ Wallace, 'E Unibus Pluram', p.65.

obverse; in Postman's terms, the 'rise of the adultified child' mirrors 'the rise of the childified adult'.²⁰⁵ Considering this reciprocity allows fertile ground to reflect upon how we understand postmodernism, and, tying together many disparate threads treated thusfar, the 'Adult-Child' can perhaps also help us to understand how these various postmodernisms have led to the America of the 2000s and beyond.

²⁰⁵ Postman, *Disappearance of Childhood*, p.138.

Chapter 4: The Adult-Child

The last chapter of this study very much forms the culmination of the previous three. Most obviously, the ‘Adult-Child’ represents a logical counterpart to the ‘The Prodigious Child’, and one inspiration for its title stems again from Neil Postman, a key figure in the last chapter. As well as picturing an ‘adultified child’ losing out on the simple joys of childhood, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (1982) warns of a new generation of ‘grown-up[s] whose intellectual and emotional capacities are unrealized and, in particular, not significantly different from those associated with children’.¹ The reasoning Postman posits is familiar: it is again the fault of a television-saturated consumerist culture, breeding adults who watch cartoons, eat junk food, and wear children’s clothes.² Postman’s historical sense is shaky, as are his culturally specific (and often ableist) distinctions between ‘child’ and ‘adult’, which tend to rest primarily upon normative assumptions of literacy, intelligence, and cultural taste. If his depiction of the ‘childish adult’ seems to stray into the realm of pseudo-psychology, however, it finds a useful counterpart in another contemporaneous vision of the regressive adult: the term ‘Adult Child’ is used here in pop psychology and self-help literature to refer to adults who have suffered trauma in early life. My sense of the term touches both usages, in addition to a more general sense that adults in the later twentieth century have become more ‘childish’ in their behaviours and tastes. As will be seen, this touches a longer lineage than just Postman, and proves relevant to many of the authors seen in the first and second chapters; from even the earliest texts I have treated, postmodernist authors’ depiction of childish adults betrays the particularly porous borders between the two in the second half of the twentieth century.

Literary Antecedents and Historical Contexts

Previous links between novels of childhood and ‘childish adults’ have been emphasized by Claudia Nelson, whose study of ‘age inversion’ in Victorian literature notes the extent to which novels of childhood written by adults (and often explicitly for adults) often ask a reader to ‘adopt a childlike mind-set’, or indulge in ‘a nostalgic longing for innocence’.³ Authors’ tendency to locate positive qualities in children, meanwhile, commonly leads to a restatement of these traits in adult characters, like the ‘kindly child man’ Joe Gargery in *Great Expectations*, or the fantasy of

¹ Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1982), p.99.

² Ibid., pp.128-30.

³ Claudia Nelson, *Precocious Children and Childish Adults: Age Inversion in Victorian Literature* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), pp.5, 11.

girlish purity seen in *David Copperfield*'s Dora Spenlow.⁴ The latter's eroticization of a feminine 'childishness' betray the extent to which the nostalgia of Victorian novelists often showed an uncomfortable slippage between different kinds of 'child love', as James Kincaid and Catherine Robson have observed—hence why Lewis Carroll's and J.M. Barrie's relationship with children has been commonly read as an expression of paedophilic desire.⁵ Though these speculations have long been contested, they should remind us of the troubling logic inhabiting the child-worlds of Wonderland and Neverland. Such liminal 'betwixt-and-between' spaces represent the chance both for unsupervised children to play at being adults, and adults to rejuvenate their childish instincts.⁶ This weakening of the distinctions between the 'adult' and the 'childish' does perhaps empower children, but also invites adults to indulge in a fantasy of 'growing down' in which they can cast off any real-world responsibilities and duties of care. In this vein, Jacqueline Rose has centred the figure of Peter Pan—surely the most famous 'adult-child' in Anglophone literature—to characterise the liminal state of children's literature more broadly, in which 'adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver), but where neither of them enter the space in between'.⁷ Essentially, any iteration of the literary child (constructed as it is via an adult imagination) becomes less a representation of 'childness' than of an adult's fantasy of childhood, and such images are liable to be used less as an attempt to interrogate the existence of children than to induce adult nostalgia.

The figure of the childish adult in much nineteenth-century English literature finds a counterpart in some of the earliest American literature. Centrally, Rip Van Winkle appears at the start of Washington Irving's 1812 story as a reluctant husband and idle worker, who prefers to surround himself with 'a troop of [children]' for whom he 'made [...] playthings, taught [...] to fly kites and shoot marbles'.⁸ Rip's magical sleep during the story leads him, suitably enough, to miss twenty years of U.S. history; even more so than Peter Pan, Irving's 'forever young' protagonist is depicted as essentially regressive, unable to cope with the rapidly changing

⁴ Nelson, *Age Inversion*, p.51.

⁵ See James Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992); Catherine Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁶ Emma Hayes, 'Betwixt-and-between: Liminality in Golden Age Children's Literature', Ph.D. thesis (Deakin University, 2018), retrieved from <https://dro.deakin.edu.au/eserv/DU:30116551/hayes-betwixtandbetween-2018.pdf> (25/01/2021).

⁷ Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, Or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1994), pp.1-2.

⁸ Washington Irving, *Rip Van Winkle*, in *Rip Van Winkle and Other Stories* (St Ives: Puffin Books, 2010), pp.1-29 (p.5).

circumstances of early American life.⁹ Arguing for the centrality of Irving's text to the American canon, Leslie Fiedler famously posited a 'childish' quality to much American literature as a whole:

The great works of American fiction are notoriously at home in the children's section of the library, their level of sentimentality precisely that of a pre-adolescent. This is part of what we mean when we talk about the incapacity of the American novelist to develop; in a compulsive way he returns to a limited world of experience, usually associated with his childhood, writing the same book over and over again until he lapses into silence or self-parody.¹⁰

It is along these lines that Fiedler reads works as diverse as Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and Kerouac's *On The Road* (1957). Here, the repeated figure of the rebel or restless wanderer is read less as an expression of Emersonian individualism than an attempt to 'turn from society to nature or nightmare out of a desperate need to avoid the facts of marriage, wooing, and child-bearing'.¹¹ Fiedler's conspicuous use of the male third person above proves apt; the American canon's entreaty to transform '[adults'] own inmost images of themselves into children' seems to centre upon men.¹² It is a notable feature of this chapter that much postmodernist literature centres upon what Tim Engles has termed 'white male nostalgia', similarly to many of the works mentioned above but oftentimes in more critical (and self-critical) guises.¹³ Nostalgia is seen to be less a yearning for some universal and essential state of prelapsarian childhood, but culturally specific to our own privilege and biases, and less about personal memory than about the mediations and redeployments of past images in the present.

The depiction of childhood in artistic forms meant for adults is obviously nothing new, but the mid- to late-twentieth century marks an important historical moment for the diffusion of children's culture into American culture at large. The kind of 'childish' pursuits that Postman identified had become popular with adults by the '70s and '80s—such as comic books, cartoons, toys and fast food—does show a certain historical sense, even if it lacks a great deal of nuance in understanding these forms (many of which were not originally meant for children at all).¹⁴ In the case of comics, Roger Sabin notes the period between the 1960s and the 1990s as a pivotal

⁹ See, for instance, Robert A. Ferguson, 'Rip Van Winkle and the Generational Divide in American Culture', *Early American Literature*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2005), pp.529-44.

¹⁰ Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Champaign, ILL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2003), p.24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.25.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.290.

¹³ See Tim Engles, *White Male Nostalgia in Contemporary North American Literature* (Switzerland: Springer, 2018).

¹⁴ See, for instance, Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*, trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2009), pp.191-5.

moment for the development of ‘adult comics’; having been entrenched as ‘a quintessentially juvenile format’ with the ‘first major boom in the comics industry’ in the 1930s and ‘40s, subsequent years saw much controversy between the ‘childish’ connotation of comic strips and its potential for an adult readership.¹⁵ As early as 1943, the Children’s Book Committee of the Child Study Association objected to comics’ increasing ‘violence of subject matter’, and Wertham’s famous *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) inspired the censorious 1954 Comics Code, both of which aimed to keep this format free of ‘adult content’.¹⁶ Whilst this did lead to much repression in the industry, the growth of underground comics in the ‘60s and ‘70s provided material aimed specifically at an older readership; in this sense, artefacts like Robert Crumb’s *Fritz the Cat* represent perhaps the birth of ‘the modern era in the evolution of adult comics in America’ two decades before the popularization of the graphic novel in the 1980s.¹⁷ The considerable literary acclaim garnered by much of these early graphic novels (especially *Watchmen*, *Maus*, and *The Dark Knight Returns*) has led the decade to become associated with the emergence of ‘adult comics’ as a viable art form, contemporaneously to much of Postman’s writing. Similar trends can be seen in the case of animated television, which also underwent periods of censorship during its Golden Age to keep it ‘child-friendly’, before flourishing again into a broader format in the decades after WW2; by the 1980s and 1990s, examples like *The Simpsons*, *Beavis and Butthead* and *South Park* had again entrenched the form of the ‘adult cartoon’ at the century’s close.¹⁸

Despite the problems underlying the compartmentalization of ‘adult’ and ‘child’ culture that coinages like ‘adult cartoon’ assume (most of these ‘childish’ forms had considerable antecedents in adult culture, and their popularity mainly reflects the accessibility and inexpensiveness of the format) the idea that the second half of the twentieth century has seen a ‘diminution in the character of adulthood’ remained a popular notion nonetheless.¹⁹ Postman here places the increasing popularity of ‘childish’ hobbies and cultural forms alongside factors as

¹⁵ Roger Sabin, *Adult Comics* (London & New York: Routledge, 2013), p.144.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp.146-7.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.171.

¹⁸ See the discussion of the Hays Code in Karl F. Cohen, *Forbidden Animation: Censored Cartoons and Blacklisted Animators in America* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013), pp.17-19.

¹⁹ Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, p.134. As mentioned in my introduction, such fluid examples make it hard to designate what constitutes a ‘childish’ cultural or artistic form; it is hard to call an animated show like *The Flintstones* an example of ‘children’s culture’ when it was aired during prime time, and it should be recognized that underground cartoons like *Escalation* (1968) and *Mickey Mouse Goes to Vietnam* (1972) represent as much a throwback to some more risqué iterations of *Betty Boop* and *Looney Tunes* as an attempt to ‘adultify’ a form of children’s culture.

diverse as: the rising divorce rate and falling birth rate after the 1960s; the ‘emergence of the “old persons home” as a major social institution’; the tendency for adults to use slang and ‘teenage locutions’ in their everyday speech; the depiction of adult characters on television who ‘do not take their work seriously’; and the ‘inanity of popular TV programs’ in general.²⁰ All are evidence for the fact that ‘American adults do not want to be parents of children less than they want to be children themselves’, remaining essentially regressive in their taste, and reluctant to accept any responsibilities that might interrupt their comfort and pleasure.²¹ Postman here recalls arguments made by Christopher Lasch in *The Culture of Narcissism* (1978), in which Lasch averred that the new philosophical imperative of American life was to ‘live for yourself’, amid both ‘an erosion of any strong concern for posterity’ and a ‘weakening of social ties’.²² Like Postman, this ‘new narcissism’ is often described in terms of an inability to grow up; American culture’s fantasies of ‘omnipotence and eternal youth’, combined with a polarized political discourse that ‘increasingly derives from the child’s primitive fantasies about his parents’, have made a generation less fit for parenting than in need of parenting themselves.²³ Lasch would later make this point even clearer, clarifying that the ‘narcissism’ of which he spoke was not necessarily simply selfishness, but was rooted in the Freudian sense of ‘primary narcissism’, which besets the infant before ‘it learns to distinguish itself from its surroundings, [and] it begins to understand that its wishes do not control the world’.²⁴ The lingering narcissism of American life thereby becomes an inability to reach ‘emotional maturity’, in which Americans might ‘accept limitations in a spirit of gratitude and contrition’, and embrace ‘the homely comforts of love, work, and family life’.²⁵

Lasch’s suggestion that the social malaise of the ‘70s was rooted in the arrested development of younger American adults—which mirrors Dan Kiley’s famous account of ‘Peter Pan Syndrome’ in 1983—reveals a longer lineage to his ideas.²⁶ Though the psychologist Siegfried Bernfeld proposed the idea of ‘prolonged adolescence’ as early as the 1920s, citing the tumultuous political and artistic climate of the era, the concept was revived and fleshed out during the youth culture of the long Sixties.²⁷ Writing in 1954, Peter Blos used the term to

²⁰ Ibid., pp.126-9, 133, 138.

²¹ Ibid., p.138.

²² Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (W.W. Norton & Co, 1991), pp.5, 51.

²³ Ibid., p.40.

²⁴ Ibid., pp.241-2.

²⁵ Ibid., pp.238, 242.

²⁶ Dan Kiley, *The Peter Pan Syndrome: The Men Who Have Never Grown Up* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1983).

²⁷ See Richard C. Marohn, ‘A Re-examination of Peter Blos’s concept of prolonged adolescence’ in Esman (ed.), *Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 23 (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp.3-17; Peter Blos, ‘Prolonged adolescence:

classify a type of ‘American middle-class young man, roughly between eighteen and twenty-two, who usually attends college’ and is ‘financially dependent on his family during the early years of adulthood’; for such a person, ‘clinging to the adolescent’s unsettledness of all life’s issues’ and the child’s ‘sense of elation and uniqueness’, life never moves on from easy ‘forms of discharge [like] masturbation, sleep, [and] eating’, and attempts at prolonged concentration are ‘bound to result in failure’.²⁸ A decade later, Arthur Goldberg extended Bloss’ model to the ranging concept of ‘juvenatrics’, citing the influence of permissive parenting, urbanized and ‘mechanized living’, ‘prolonged schooling’, and the ‘youth-centred[ness]’ of American society more broadly.²⁹ Goldberg’s account of restless young adults yet to learn self-sufficiency is again alarmist, but does touch upon socioeconomic factors that have become important to more recent scholarly accounts of maturation. Arnett’s idea of ‘emerging adulthood’ at the close of the twentieth century, for instance, provides a useful framework to account for young people who reach important life stages that mark adulthood—Lasch’s ‘love, work, and family life’—later than their parents or grandparents.³⁰ This takes account of important contextual factors like the increasing availability of tertiary education and inflation of house prices during the later twentieth century, as well as the shifts in religious and cultural thought that have changed the status of marriage and childrearing in American and European life. Nevertheless, more loaded accounts of childish adults unable to take personal responsibility or gain self-sufficiency have retained much cultural currency in many corners of conservative discourse and pop psychology; even today, we can see the legacy of such accounts in the work of self-help gurus like Jordan Peterson and Eckhart Tolle, and in accounts of the ‘snowflake generation’ more broadly.

Self-help literature and pop psychology form another important context for accounts of arrested development in the later twentieth century. Influential works like W. Hugh Missildine’s *Your Inner Child of the Past* (1963) prefigure a proliferation of self-help books in the later ‘80s and ‘90s about the ‘inner child’ or ‘adult-child’, such as John and Linda Friel’s *Adult Children: The Secrets of Dysfunctional Families* (1987), Charles L. Whitfield’s *Healing the Child Within* (1987), and Penny Park’s *Rescuing Your Inner Child* (1990). Though all have slightly different scopes, they all

The formulation of a syndrome and its therapeutic implications’, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1954), pp.733–742.

²⁸ Bloss, ‘Prolonged Adolescence’, pp.733–4.

²⁹ Arthur Goldberg, ‘Juvenatrics: Study of Prolonged Adolescence’, *The Clearing House*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (December 1966), pp.218–222 (pp.218, 21).

³⁰ See Alan Reifman, Malinda J. Colwell and Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, ‘Emerging Adulthood: Theory, Assessment and Application’, *Journal of Youth Development*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Summer 2007), pp.1–12.

similarly adapt Freudian theories of repression to engage with formational trauma in adults, and are often aimed specifically at survivors of addiction, violence, or sexual abuse. Again, such popular iterations do resemble some more scholarly developments in psychology; an important 1995 study conducted by Kaiser Permanente and the CDC, for instance, has given us the term ‘Adverse Childhood Experiences’ (or ‘ACEs’) to refer to traumatic events in childhood which can affect a person’s psychosocial development.³¹ The study, despite being conducted upon a ‘cohort that was predominantly White, well-educated adults with good healthcare’, found that ‘close to two-thirds of the respondents reported experiencing at least one adversity’, whilst ‘all generations with one or more early-life adversities were at greater risk for substance abuse, mental illness, and perpetrating violence compared to those reporting no ACEs’.³² Subsequent studies have conducted more specific research into various types of ACE, and have used more diverse sampling to research ACEs, but have agreed with the original studies’ correlation between childhood trauma and unsettled or antisocial behaviour later in life.³³ Recalling the ‘lousy chain of inherited habit’ seen in my second chapter, these ‘symptoms of trauma may perpetuate the same ACEs to the next generation, giving rise to the intergenerational cycle of these exposures’ through time.³⁴

The influence of such varied contemporaneous discourse will become clear during this chapter, in various senses of the term ‘Adult-Child’. Accounts of American adults’ increasingly childish cultural tastes, their reluctance to embrace the ‘grown-up’ responsibilities of work and family, and their inability to pass beyond childhood trauma, all betray a central anxiety in the second half of the twentieth century that the ways in which adults are growing up (especially younger adults) are changing, and perhaps not for the better. As a historical fact, it can hardly be argued that the circumstances of Boomers’, Gen Xers’, and Millennials’ maturation was markedly different to that of pre-WW2 generations, and indeed markedly different from each other’s,

³¹ See Shanta R. Dube, ‘Twenty Years and Counting: The past, present and future of ACEs research’, in Gordon J.G. Asmundson and Tracie O. Afifi (eds.), *Adverse Childhood Experiences: Using Evidence to Advance Research, Practice, Policy, and Prevention* (Academic Press, 2020), pp.3-16; Roberta Waite and Ruth Ann Ryan, *Adverse Childhood Experiences: What Students and Health Professionals Need to Know* (London and Oxford: Routledge, 2020); Julia L. Sheffler, Ian Stanley, Natalie Sachs-Ericsson, ‘ACEs and Mental Health Outcomes’, in Gordon J.G. Asmundson and Tracie O. Afifi (eds.), *Adverse Childhood Experiences: Using Evidence to Advance Research, Practice, Policy, and Prevention* (Academic Press, 2020), pp.47-69.

³² Dube, ‘Twenty Years and Counting’, pp.3-4.

³³ See, for example Goldstein, Topitzes, Miller-Cribbs et al., ‘Influence of race/ethnicity and income on the link between adverse childhood experiences and child flourishing’, *Pediatric Research* (2020), pp.1-9; Kristen Slack, Sarah Font and Jennifer Jones, ‘The Complex Interplay of Adverse Childhood Experiences, Race, and Income’, *Health Social Work*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Feb 2017), pp.24-31.

³⁴ Waite and Ryan, *Adverse Childhood Experiences*, p.42; Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage, 1994), p.465.

thanks in large part to the historical factors that have been highlighted in previous chapters—changes in childrearing norms and an increasingly child-centric culture more broadly; political and cultural upheaval and the rise of youth culture; increasing rates of divorce and a falling birth rate; and a technologically accelerated culture that has, in a fairly short amount of time, become more and more ingrained in young peoples' lives. Taking account of all of these and more, this chapter will pick up threads that have run through the first three, ranging through over fifty years of postmodernist literature inhabited by many authors mentioned thusfar. Bringing together much of what we have already seen, this chapter will show how these varied 'postmodernisms' entangle in their collisions of the 'adult' and the 'childish'; these collisions betray much broader anxieties about identity, history, teleology, and narrative in the era of postmodernity.

Adult Regression and Postmodern Nostalgia: from Pynchon to Wallace

In much early postmodernism, the irruptive element of the 'childish' often betrays a broader nostalgic urge that invites adults to regress into the past. Consonant with the 'great temporal homesickness' of which Benny Profane talks in *V.*, the term 'nostalgia' was coined in the seventeenth century to designate a painful yearning to return home; blending the Greek *nostos*, meaning home, and *algia*, meaning pain, it was used to refer specifically to a condition witnessed in Swiss mercenaries fighting far from their native soil.³⁵ Starobinski's genealogy of the term shows us that, even if its scope was broadened in subsequent centuries, it didn't shed the connotations of a medical disorder until the turn of the twentieth century, by which time its spatial longing had indeed become temporal, and its suggestion of pain had been exchanged for a sense of thoughtful longing or remembering.³⁶ Scholarly research since the mid-century has subsequently given us a whole host of particular variants, which (despite substantial slippage and overlap between them) will become important to the sense of 'nostalgia' seen in this chapter. Fred Davis, for instance, makes an important distinction between an 'individual nostalgia' rooted in personal memory, and the 'collective nostalgia' communities and cultures feel for a shared history.³⁷ Svetlana Boym, meanwhile, characterizes the desire to recover some lost past as 'restorative nostalgia', distinct from a merely 'reflective nostalgia', in which we wistfully immerse

³⁵ Thomas Pynchon, *V.* (London: Vintage, 2000), p.148. Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (London: The Free Press, 1979), pp.1-2.

³⁶ Jean Starobinski, 'The Idea of Nostalgia', trans. William S. Kemp, *Diogenes*, Vol. 14, No. 54 (1966), pp.81-103.

³⁷ See Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, pp.122-3.

ourselves with images of the past.³⁸ Boym's study provides a useful reminder that nostalgia needn't simply be a form of retrogression (reflecting upon the past can illuminate paths to a more equitable future), but emphasizes the extent to which any worthwhile experience of nostalgia must be accompanied by an appropriate level of scepticism toward elements of the past which are idealized. Without this appropriate level of self-awareness, nostalgia is liable to become inimical to change and essentially 'regressive', as Pickering and Keightley note; this 'regressive nostalgia' uses a 'limited set of idealised images of the past [to] appeal only to the component of backwards longing in nostalgia, and conceal or deny the loss and painful sense of lack', which might be more useful for a meaningful engagement with the past.³⁹

Pickering and Keightley's emphasis upon the uses of this kind of 'regressive nostalgia' in commercial contexts is of particular importance. Whilst the veneration and commodification of nostalgia is hardly a new development (as Gary Cross has pointed out), much scholarship in the last few decades has characterized the later twentieth century as being in the grip of a 'nostalgia boom', or the condition that Simon Reynolds has called 'retromania' with regard to film and music.⁴⁰ The historical sense of this nostalgia lies in the hyperconnected world of late capitalism traced in the last chapter; nostalgia here may represent 'a reaction to fast technologies [...] in desiring to slow down', or to escape to a 'simpler time', and yet it is clear that much nostalgia relies heavily on these technologies as a means by which to catalogue and relive past memories.⁴¹ Derek Kompare, for instance, has posited that the 'nostalgia boom' can be traced to the late Sixties and the syndication of television programmes, and Andrew Hoskins places emphasis on the mass availability of home video in the '80s as a seminal moment in the history of collective 'rewatching'.⁴² More specifically to this thesis, we might also note the commodification of children's play in the second half of the twentieth century, which has not only increased the amount of targeted cultural artefacts to which we are exposed as children, but added an 'ephemeral' quality (in the words of Cross) to mass-produced trends that are unlikely to last to

³⁸ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), pp.49-50.

³⁹ Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley, 'Retrotyping and the Marketing of Nostalgia', in Katharina Niemeyer (ed.), *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present, and Future* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), pp.83-94 (p.84).

⁴⁰ See Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011); Gary Cross, 'Historical roots of consumption-based nostalgia for childhood in the United States', in Elisabeth Wesseling (ed.), *Reinventing Childhood Nostalgia: Books, Toys, and Contemporary Media Culture* (Routledge, 2018), pp.19-35.

⁴¹ Katharina Niemeyer, 'Introduction', in *Media and Nostalgia*, pp.1-15 (pp.2-3).

⁴² See Derek Kompare, *Rerun Nation: How Repeats Invented American Television* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2005); and Andrew Hoskins, 'Media and the Closure of the Memory Boom', in Niemeyer (ed.), *Media and Nostalgia*, pp.118-125.

adulthood.⁴³ Instead, these products are often given a second life in the form of the ‘re-release’ or ‘reboot’, or are rediscovered in iterations specifically reorientated toward adult concerns, as in the case of ‘adult cartoons’ and ‘adult comics’. It is through this culture of repackaging material from youth that the concept of the ‘nostalgia cycle’ has come into focus in the recent past; lasting roughly twenty to thirty years, these intervals reflect the gap to artistic creators’ nostalgic reminiscences from youth, as well as the amount of time it takes for children to grow into adult consumers who might be targeted with this material.⁴⁴

Of particular use here is M. Keith Booker’s notion of ‘postmodern nostalgia’, which touches and coalesces many of these previous senses of the term.⁴⁵ According to Booker, ‘postmodern nostalgia’ fulfils three key categories: number one, it ‘requires no basis in historical truth’ (recalling Stern’s distinction of ‘historical’ and ‘ahistorical nostalgia’); two, it is mediated not through memories but selective cultural images (recalling Pickering and Keightley’s ‘regressive nostalgia’); and three, ‘postmodern nostalgia, like everything else, is thoroughly commodified’ (akin to Gary Cross’ ‘consumed nostalgia’).⁴⁶ The adjective ‘postmodern’ does a lot of heavy lifting here, but provides a useful focal point for this chapter, inasmuch as Booker’s conception of nostalgia inspired primarily by simulacral images touches both the sceptical logic of postmodernism and the historical conditions of postmodernity.⁴⁷ It thereby does much to highlight the influence of nostalgia in postmodernism, two terms whose coalescence is often unclear. Boym, for instance, dismisses postmodernists’ sense of the past as ‘nostalgia within quotation marks’, inasmuch it represents less a genuine idealization of the past than an ironic deployment of historical forms.⁴⁸ Similarly, Jameson talks about the ‘nostalgia film’ as a characteristically postmodern form, but mainly in terms of its potential for wearing the ‘mask’ of pastiche, even if he admits that this appropriation of ‘dead forms’ might satisfy ‘a deep [...] longing to experience them again’.⁴⁹ Along with Linda Hutcheon’s sense of ‘historiographic metafiction’ (previously discussed in my second chapter), much scholarly uncertainty toward

⁴³ Cross, ‘Consumption-based nostalgia’, p.22.

⁴⁴ Gary Cross, *Consumed Nostalgia: Memory in the Age of Fast Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp.52-3. See also Dave Berry, *On Nostalgia* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2020).

⁴⁵ M. Keith Booker, *Postmodern Hollywood: What’s New in Film and Why it Makes us Feel So Strange* (Westport, Ct: Praeger Publishing, 2007).

⁴⁶ See Booker, *Postmodern Hollywood*, pp.50-1; Barbara Stern, ‘Historical and Personal Nostalgia in Advertising Text: The Fin de siècle Effect’, *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (December 1992), pp.11-22.

⁴⁷ See S.D. Chrostowska, ‘Consumed by Nostalgia’, *SubStance*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2010), pp.52-70.

⁴⁸ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p.30.

⁴⁹ Fredric Jameson, ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’, in Hal Foster (ed.), *Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1983), pp.111-25 (pp.116-17).

postmodernism's use of 'dead forms' relates to parallel anxieties about postmodernism's (and postmodernity's) sense of history, which will be probed in more detail in the second half of this chapter.⁵⁰ If postmodernism acknowledges the fictiveness of a textual 'history', which is the only sense of the 'real' past we have, it does seem logical that it might find it difficult to find genuine worth in the act of looking back or reawakening the past. That which is clear, however, is that by reference to postmodernist literature and 'postmodern nostalgia', authors' concern is often less the distinction between an objective ('worldly') and subjective (textual) past, but how those images of the past are mediated and deployed, and to what end.⁵¹

Booker's emphasis upon postmodern nostalgia's mediation by cultural images of youth tessellates with my own emphasis upon the uses of child culture in postmodernist literature. Granted, the growth of forms like 'adult comics' and 'adult cartoons' in the '50s and '60s makes it difficult to conflate writers' predilection for such cultural forms with nostalgia; early postmodernists' use of child culture (laid out in my first chapter) represents as much a reflection of the use of these conventions in contemporary publications like *The East Village Other*, or the iconography of the Yippies, as an attempt to interpolate cultural artefacts from childhood. Even so, the countercultural obsession with youth culture, specifically in the fervour for the innocently or irreverently 'childish', makes itself felt in early postmodernist authors' tend to venerate young adult protagonists with one foot still in pre-pubescence. In Fariña's *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up to Me* (1966), Gnossus Papadopoulos first appears with a 'Captain Midnight Code-o-Graph' and a 'boy scout shirt', and carries the nickname 'Pooh Bear' throughout the novel.⁵² The Loop Garoo Kid in Ishmael Reed's *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* is embraced by the children of Yellow Back Radio, since he and his sidekick 'aren't ordinary old people, [but] children like [them]', and he helps them oust all the adults from the town.⁵³ Other examples err on a slightly more surreal or disturbing admixture of innocence and experience—like Don Barthelme's 'Me and Miss Mandible', in which a thirty-five-year-old somehow finds himself in elementary school, or Vonnegut's many instances of regression in response to trauma—but we can clearly see the irreverent clash of 'adult' and 'childish' that characterizes the Animate Child. Since these texts venerate a vision of the independent child, free from many of the prejudices and responsibilities associated with a repressive and conservative 'adult' world, their protagonists (many of whom are

⁵⁰ See Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York & London: Routledge, 1988).

⁵¹ Ibid., pp.124-5.

⁵² Richard Fariña's *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up to Me*, (New York; London: Penguin, 1996), pp.4-5.

⁵³ Ishmael Reed, *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (London: Allison & Busby, 1995) pp.15-16, 165.

conspicuously close to their authors in age and politics) are drawn naturally to associate with children rather than adults, and show a Rubinesque belief in the ability to remain essentially 'childish' regardless of age. Particularly since most of these texts' fascination with children comes through the lens of adult focalisers or narrators, their vision of post-pubescent life always remains more fixated upon the freedoms of youth than the responsibilities of home or family.

This backwards-looking view of adulthood comes to define the work of Thomas Pynchon, from early postmodernist novels like *V.* (1963) and *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965) through works like *Inherent Vice* (2009) and *Bleeding Edge* (2012). Almost all of his novels centre on characters in their twenties or thirties who remain fixated upon children and child culture: there is the human yo-yo Benny Profane, the comic-book and cartoon enthusiasts Oedipa and Slothrop, the pinball wizard Zoyd Wheeler, and Doc Sportello, who listens to familiar tunes on the radio to remind him of a 'childhood [he] had never much felt he wanted to escape from'.⁵⁴ Outside of these protagonists, we find other key examples like the former child-actor Metzger, the children's television lovers John Nefastis and Sauncho Smilax, the Beanie Baby collector Vryva, and even a character as drab as Herbert Stencil, who is moved to remember 'a childhood of gingerbread witches, enchanted parks, fantasy country' after seeing the Villa di Sammut in Valletta.⁵⁵ Mirroring Vonnegut's dictum that 'Maturity [...] is a bitter disappointment for which no remedy exists', an immersion in the childish is suggested as far preferable to joining a threatening and amoral world of the 'adult'; after all, Benny Profane's restless 'yo-yoing' protects him from the dull, inanimate world that Rachel Owlglass inhabits, and Oedipa's meeting with children in Golden Gate Park keeps her from the 'printed circuit' of San Narciso.⁵⁶ Particularly in these earlier novels, Pynchon's privileging of the childish seems natural in conjunction with his broader association of children with a 'radical, extra-discursive innocence', as Sofia Kolbuszewska has observed.⁵⁷ In the same way as Reed or Fariña, an adult character's embrace of childishness again signals an aversion to those qualities associated with a repressive 'adult' conservatism and, in Pynchon's case, with the Western vision of modernity more generally: an aversion to fancy or play, an entry into the world of capitalist exploitation (via the 'adult' emphasis upon employment and career), and a submission to the various racist and sexist biases

⁵⁴ Thomas Pynchon, *Inherent Vice* (London: Vintage, 2009), p.125.

⁵⁵ Thomas Pynchon, *V.* (London: Vintage, 2000), p.474.

⁵⁶ Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle* (London; New York: Penguin, 2008), p.141; Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.89-90, 13.

⁵⁷ Sofia Kolbuszewska, "'It Has to Be More Than the Simple Conditioning of a Child, Once Upon a Time': The Use of the Child in *Gravity's Rainbow*", *Pynchon Notes*, Vol. 42-3 (1998) pp.111-20 (p.116).

that underlie a conservative vision of patriotism and ‘family values’. Pynchon’s interpolation of childish texts, meanwhile, signals his aversion to the expectations of ‘serious fiction’, with which his historiographic metafiction might be read as bolstering elitist canons of taste, or worse still, as a drab collection of historical ‘Facts’ with some claim to epistemological authority.⁵⁸

Even if the ‘childish’ may claim some regenerative powers in Pynchon’s fiction, the author maintains a critical eye to the ways in which it affects his protagonists. Here it is particularly fruitful to read through his canon as a whole, since many later works, like *Vineland* (1991) and *Inherent Vice* (2009), reflect upon the same historical moment into which his earlier novels were published. Frank Kermode’s famous denigration of *Vineland* as ‘hippie nostalgia’ does intimate the extent to which both of these novels can be read as a lament for the failed promise of the 1960s; certainly, Pynchon’s retrospective zeal for the decade seems one instance of his canon’s tendency to look back wistfully upon those ‘forks in the road that America never took’.⁵⁹ This nostalgic urge is one of which Pynchon is hardly unaware, however, and he centres his protagonists’ desire to return to a memory of the counterculture as a regressive descent into the past. In *Vineland*, the desire to escape the ‘snitch culture’ of Reagan’s America manifests in Zoyd and Mucho’s wistful longing for the ‘green free America of their childhoods’, contrasted sharply to the ‘heartless [...] scabland garrison state’ of their present.⁶⁰ Pynchon here reveals both a familiar Romantic yearning for scenes of natural beauty in the face of industrial development—such as Zoyd’s memories of the ‘primary sea coast, forest, riverbanks and bay’ that preceded the Eureka-Crescent City-Vineland megalopolis—and an association between the height of the 1960s and the bliss of childhood, strengthened by Zoyd’s memories of Prairie’s infancy.⁶¹ Zoyd’s disillusioned ‘80s teenager is re-remembered as an ‘innocent child’, light enough to ‘lie face down on the glass’ of a pinball machine, and young enough to access a magical ‘world behind the world she had known all along’.⁶² Zoyd’s veneration of Prairie marks him as one of Pynchon’s many adult characters whose love of children reveals a profound urge to return to childhood themselves, and not always for the better. Whilst Wheeler’s temporal homesickness for the ‘60s shows a clear aversion to the conservative shifts that followed the New Left, and Zoyd’s animate lifestyle avoids a threateningly ‘adult’ world of routine and conformity (of which

⁵⁸ See the disavowal of dull ‘Facts’ in Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon* (London: Vintage, 1998), pp.349-50.

⁵⁹ Frank Kermode, ‘That Was Another Planet’, *London Review of Books* (8 February 1990), p.3; Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.658-9.

⁶⁰ Thomas Pynchon, *Vineland* (London, Vintage, 2000), p.314.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.317.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp.314-15.

his FBI counterpart Brock Vond is the image *par excellence*), we should be wary of reading Zoyd's childishness as plainly sympathetic. After all, his nostalgia merely fuels his retreat from activism into sedentary obscurity, and the novel makes clear the hypocrisy in the character's denigration of the Reagan administration's desire to 'flee into the past', when most of Zoyd's political fervour has been transformed into a longing for idealized memories of 'the Mellow Sixties', in which all 'the visible world was a sunlit sheep farm' and 'everybody had got along magically'.⁶³

Pynchon's association of the Sixties with an idyllic vision of youth emphasizes both a nostalgia *for* the decade, and some of the more nostalgic urges *of* the decade. Since so many cultural mouthpieces of the Sixties voiced their principles along a binary of 'child' and 'adult', the act of being 'childish' becomes a form of political praxis regardless of age—see Jerry Rubin's famous insistence that no-one over thirty should be trusted, or Barthelme's recalibration of this age to twelve in *Snow White*. This is something of which Pynchon, especially with the benefit of hindsight, is particularly canny toward, and comparisons between hippies and children abound in both *Vineland* and *Inherent Vice*. For Brock Vond, the social unrest of the 1960s represented less a cogent politics than a disparate collection of 'left wing kiddie games' and 'children longing for discipline', whilst even Frenesi Gates is forced to re-assess her time in the militant film collective 24fps as akin to 'running around like little kids with toy weapons'.⁶⁴ *Inherent Vice's* Doc Sportello, meanwhile, finds a handbook about 'Dealing with the Hippie' that warns of 'his childlike nature', and impresses the LAPD detective Bigfoot by being 'one of the few hippie potheads [...] who appreciate[s] the distinction between childlike and childish'.⁶⁵ Whilst this thin semantic distinction (which I do not myself make) does intimate that Pynchon's veneration of the child might be a matter of which qualities of 'childness' an adult chooses to imitate, his references to the counterculture in the terms of childhood should alert us that his novels of the 1960s are not unambiguously positive. Here, Joanna Freer is right to make the distinction between Pynchon's interpretation of specific protest movements and the 'kind of naïve, free-floating, or escapist idealism he finds [...] extremely damaging and destructive to the revolutionary cause'.⁶⁶ Both Frenesi's childish film collective and Zoyd's post-Sixties nostalgia fail because they 'lose track [...] about what was real'; by using cameras instead of weapons, 24fps are ultimately drawn into the hyperreal 'Tubal' culture of the post-Sixties, and Zoyd's idyllic memories of the past are

⁶³ Ibid., p.38.

⁶⁴ Pynchon, *Vineland*, pp.240, 259.

⁶⁵ Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, p.213.

⁶⁶ Joanna Freer, *Pynchon and American Counterculture* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.158.

shown to erase the more urgent realities of ‘War in Vietnam, murder as an instrument of American politics, black neighbourhoods torched to ashes and death’.⁶⁷ The reason why Brock Vond finds it so ‘easy to turn and cheap to develop’ hippies in his re-education program PREP is that, ‘while the Tube was proclaiming youth revolution against parents of all kinds’, many of these activists shared coherent political goals less than the ‘need only to stay children forever’.⁶⁸ Fuelled predominantly by a dialectic of generational push-and-shove, the contingent political goals of these ‘cryptically staring children’ are quickly traded for the simpler pleasures of the Tube, and fall into the cynicism of the ‘70s and ‘80s.

Clearly, even if Pynchon’s depiction of nostalgia finds some of the redemptive qualities noted by Svetlana Boym (emphasizing the possibility of communal ‘recuperation’), Pynchon also places heavy emphasis upon its more regressive qualities. The ‘childish’ urges of the 1960s do not lead to the completion of the countercultural dream but ultimately a retreat into insularity that ended the ‘Mellow Sixties’; hence we see Doc Sportello’s reflection that ‘circa 1970, “adult” was no longer quite being defined as in times previous’, and ‘among those who could afford to, a strenuous mass denial of the passage of time was under way’.⁶⁹ Confounding Brock’s suggestion that the failure of ‘60s radicalism lay with middle America’s ‘hatred of anything new’, Pynchon implies that much of the New Left’s inability to enact real change lay with its own inability to ‘grow up’, or mature into a more coherent political dogma than just ‘Do It!’.⁷⁰ Pynchon’s novel at the start of the 1970s, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, has been read persuasively as a ‘retrospective commentary on the New Left’, particularly in terms of its last segment ‘The Counterforce’, a conspicuous reference to the term ‘counterculture’ in a novel set predominantly in 1945.⁷¹ Faced with the destruction and conspiracy catalogued in its third section, the Counterforce forms itself to ‘disarm, de-penis and dismantle the Man’, driven by a loose collection of characters variously linked in their desire to avenge the various tragedies of the novel.⁷² Their acts of rebellion consist, however, of small acts of puerile vandalism and disruption: Roger Mexico and Pig Bodine, for instance, crash a dinner party held by the Krupp firm and shout vulgarities at the guests, recalling Slothrop’s earlier pie-fight with Major Marvy, his crusade as Rocket Man, and a

⁶⁷ Pynchon, *Vineland*, pp.259, 38.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.269.

⁶⁹ Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*, p.172.

⁷⁰ Pynchon, *Vineland*, p.272. Jerry Rubin was soon, of course, to abandon much of his counterculture fervour for a life in business and politics, a change accompanied by a memoir entitled *Growing Up At Thirty Seven*.

⁷¹ Freer, *Pynchon and the Counterculture*, p.45.

⁷² Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow* (London: Vintage, 2000), p.845.

scene in which Frau Gnab sets a group of drunken chimps upon Major Zhdaev's Russian troops. Admittedly, these scenes are not uncommon amid Pynchon's wider predilection for slapstick, and Freer is perhaps correct to note some sympathies here with the 'childish' hijinx of the Yippies, with which the Counterforce can escape co-optation into a fallen world of adult politics.⁷³ Yet Pynchon makes clear that such acts remain, to borrow a phrase from William Burroughs about the decade, 'like charging a regiment of tanks with a defective slingshot'; the Counterforce dissolves into a disparate array of 'glamorous ex-rebels' and 'doomed pet freaks', mirroring the novel's collapse into an increasingly fragmented and disparate collection of episodes and styles.⁷⁴ Pynchon's apparent protagonist Slothrop not only disappears from the Counterforce but from the novel as a whole, 'one plucked albatross [...] scattered all over the Zone', and the fabled V-2 is ultimately fired, sacrificing Gottfried in a fiery prolepsis to nuclear apocalypse.⁷⁵

The tragic aftertaste of Pynchon's third novel should alert us to the fact that Pynchon's characters fail in their mission despite their 'childishness'—or even because of it. Here we should stress again that *Gravity's Rainbow* remains a novel deeply ambivalent about the veneration of children; as has been discussed in my second chapter, the novel is replete with characters whose love of child culture or children bleeds into acts of paedophilia and child abuse. Captain Blicero 'cares, more than he should' about young Katje and Gottfried but uses them for his sadomasochistic fantasies, and he even names his son (who is born from Blicero's rape) after a poem from childhood in 'some sentimental overflow'.⁷⁶ Franz Pökler, meanwhile, is kept at work on the V-2 rocket at Peenemünde with a string of fake 'daughters' to keep him company; not only does he rape one of the young girls, but ultimately discovers the true Ilse amid the horrors of a nearby concentration camp. In both examples, the uncomfortable mix of the saccharine and the pornographic alerts us to the fact that a sentimental attachment to childishness often proves most harmful to real children, fulfilling Kincaid's suggestion that, 'by needing the *idea* of the child so badly, we find ourselves sacrificing the bodies of children for it'.⁷⁷ Such is the case for

⁷³ See Freer, *Pynchon and the Counterculture*, pp.40-64.

⁷⁴ William Burroughs, *Nova Express* (London: Penguin, 2010), p.44; Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, pp.845-6.

⁷⁵ Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, p.845.

⁷⁶ Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, p.119.

⁷⁷ Kincaid, *Child-Loving*, p.6. As Simon De Bourcier has noted, such porous boundaries between the nostalgic idealization and sexualization of children owe much to Nabakov's *Lolita*, in which Humbert Humbert's desire to recapture his childhood romance with Annabel Leigh catalyses his lust for young Dolores Haze: see 'Representations of Sexualized Children and Child Abuse in Thomas Pynchon's Fiction' in Ali Chetwynd, Joanna Freer and Georgios Maragos (eds.), *Pynchon, Sex and Gender* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), pp.145-161 (pp.145-6).

Slothrop, who is frequently shown to imagine himself as a child or in league with a group of children (as seen in his turn as ‘The Kid’ out to kill ‘Pernicious Pop’ in the ‘Floundering Four’ section), and who often projects features of childishness onto others, noting the ‘child’s eyes’ of Geli Tripping and ‘soft-knuckled child’s hand’ of Katje Borgesius.⁷⁸ This ‘vulnerab[ility] [...] to pretty little girls’ also shows sentimentalization giving way to sexualization, however; found among the orgy-goers who leer over Bianca’s Shirley Temple burlesque, he eventually sleeps with the ‘11 or 12’ year old himself.⁷⁹ Clearly, Slothrop’s desire for a vision of innocence is more important than the children for whom his intervention usually proves fatal—whilst he imagines a ‘stately dance’ with a ‘tiny frost-flower’ at the start of Part Three, he abandons the ‘fat kid’ Ludwig in northern Germany, and flees from the scene of soldiers ‘jumping little kids three-on-one’ in Cuxhaven.⁸⁰

Pynchon’s depiction of childish adults provides a fairly extreme example of Lynn Spigel’s notion that images of childhood often provide an excuse to travel ‘back to a fantasy world where the painful realities [...] of adult culture no longer exist’.⁸¹ As has been a theme of my second chapter, images of children are often deployed to sanitise distinctly ‘adult’ projects (nationalism, war, profit) which may have very little to do with real children, or even prove actively harmful toward them. In the case of Pynchon, the ‘childish’ provides for his characters a masturbatory immersion in an idealized past, literalized in the terms of sexual gratification and exploitation.⁸² Key to these depictions is what Simon de Bourcier has termed the ‘commodification of innocence’, noting that the relationship between adults and children depicted in the novel is indeed ‘highly commodified’, and often literally transactional—Slothrop is sold to Dr. Jamf as an infant for his sexual experiments, Franz’s ‘daughter’ is a series of hired actors, and Ludwig is suggested to have prostituted himself by the end of the novel.⁸³ It is in such depictions of ‘childishness’ made into a purchasable item that we see Gary Cross’s notion of ‘commodified nostalgia’ come to the fore, as well as the emphasis Booker’s emphasis upon the ‘thoroughly

⁷⁸ Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, pp.347, 221, 467

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp.553, 553-558.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp.337, 655, 675.

⁸¹ Lynn Spigel, ‘Seducing the Innocent: Childhood and Television in Postwar America’, in W. S. Solomon and R. W. McChesney (eds.), *Ruthless Criticism: New Perspectives in U.S. Communication History* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp.259-90 (p.259).

⁸² As well as Kincaid’s *Child-Loving*, see James R. Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); and Valerie Walkerdine, *Daddy’s Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997)

⁸³ de Bourcier, ‘Representations of Sexualized Children and Child Abuse’, pp.145-6.

commodified' nature of 'postmodern nostalgia'.⁸⁴ Like this 'postmodern nostalgia', such images of childhood are not based in historical fact but mediated through cultural images; even as Franz Pokler begins to suspect his 'Ilses' might be fake, he chooses their pleasant portrayal of an innocent girlhood over his real daughter's suffering, and Slothrop abandons the plight of children in the Zone to indulge in fantasies of superhero comics. *Gravity's Rainbow* therein looks not only back to the Animate energy of the 1960s with lament, but forward to the world of a mediatized and corporatized childhood that would be seen in his next novel, as well as many other later postmodernist authors in the '80s and '90s. Clearly, the regenerative 'childishness' seen in Pynchon's early work (and in much early postmodernism in general) has been by this time despoiled by its co-optation by the adult gain, and Pynchon's depictions of child-abuse analogue a much broader process by which childishness is drained of its Animate energy in the process of commodification.

It is here that David Foster Wallace proves an important comparison, since the author is so often stated variously as a continuance of or break from Pynchonian postmodernism. Clearly, Wallace was both widely read in his metafictional 'patriarchs', and cognisant of his writing as an attempt to reject, or at least reflect upon, the logic of early postmodernism.⁸⁵ Though only hinted as such, much of these reservations can be understood by reference to the 'childish', particularly in the knowledge that it had long since been drained of its revolutionary potential. This keys into both Wallace's sense of early postmodernism's 'mood of irony and irreverence', and television's subsequent invitation to regress into 'a sort of fetal position; a pose of passive reception to escape, comfort, reassurance'.⁸⁶ Suitably, the figures with which Wallace highlights this continuity bear the mischievous colouring of the Animate Child—Alf, Snoopy, and Bart Simpson—and his emphasis upon the 'postmodern' aspects of fast food adverts and television sitcoms recall forms centred by Postman and Lasch in their analysis of American regression. Wallace's criticism of postmodernism, then, can be stated as a reaction to an increasingly 'childish' culture that Americans (particularly younger adults) need to mature beyond:

⁸⁴ Booker, *Postmodern Hollywood*, pp.50-51.

⁸⁵ Larry McCaffrey, 'An Expanded Interview with David Foster Wallace', in Stephen J. Burn (ed.) *Conversations with David Foster Wallace* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), pp.21-52 (p.48).

⁸⁶ David Foster Wallace, 'E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction', in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* (London: Abacus, 1998), pp.21-82 (pp.41-42)

For me, the last few years of the postmodern era have seemed like the way you feel when you're in high school and your parents go on a trip, and you throw a party. [...] For a while it's great, free and freeing, parental authority gone and overthrown, a cat's-away-let's-play Dionysian revel. But then time passes and the party gets louder and louder, and you run out of drugs, and nobody's got any more for more drugs, and things get broken and spilled [...] and you gradually start wishing your parents would come home and restore some fucking order in your house.⁸⁷

Despite Wallace's reservations that this was 'not a perfect analogy', he hits upon an essential point. The imagery of postmodern 'childishness', albeit skewed toward the imagery of adolescence, aptly intimates the extent to which authors discussed in my first chapter challenged the authority of the 'adult' in various guises—canons of literary taste, political conservatism, the working world and the capitalist economy more generally—in the celebration of the child's vitality and unruliness.⁸⁸ Yet Wallace's canon, even more so than Pynchon, implies the limits to this celebration of the child, which gives free rein to some of the more toxic traits that Wallace associates with the 'childish': solipsism, selfishness, and the obsessive pursuit of pleasure.

Wallace's reapprehension of the 'childish' is clear even from his first novel *The Broom of the System*, often understood (unfairly) as a re-writing of *The Crying of Lot 49*. Wallace's depiction of Rick Vigorous most certainly recalls Pynchon's 'adult-child'; akin to Slothrop or Wheeler, Vigorous idealizes his 'magical child' Vance, whose ability to 'act out History and Event inside his own child's world' provides for his father Rick a welcome alternative to political catastrophe and romantic stagnation.⁸⁹ Like these Pynchonian characters, 'as Vance [grows] older, [Rick grows] younger and sadder', increasingly estranging himself from his unhappy son, and attempting to recapture some of the lost innocence of youth in a relationship with Lenore Beadsman (the protagonist of the novel, who is apparently 'About The Age of His Own Child') and in a nostalgic return to his old alma mater.⁹⁰ If this transmutation of the sentimental into the sexual was not clear enough, Rick also shows an erotic attachment for his neighbour's daughter Mindy Metalman, who 'undulated her way into [his] heart in the summer of her thirteenth year while ostensibly playing with the sprinkler in the lawn'.⁹¹ Later in the novel, he is predictably drawn into a sexual relationship with her as a young adult, the unsettling connotations of which seep into the stories that the character 'writes' throughout the novel; framed as a series of pulp thrillers, the last story pictures Detective Fieldbinder as the heroic saviour of a child from a

⁸⁷ McCaffrey, 'An Expanded Interview', p.52.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ David Foster Wallace, *The Broom of the System* (London: Abacus, 1997), p.75.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.77.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp.57, 210.

neighbour's paedophilic obsession. In a novel that wears its metafictional credentials on its sleeve, a reader is again led to question the disparity between Vigorous' self-fictionalizing as a tortured 'outsider' pining for his lost son, and the ugly sight of him obsessively stalking younger women.

Wallace's attendance to the more dangerous aspects of childishness offsets his more typically postmodernist deployments of child culture. As mentioned in the last chapter, his work indulges in a familiar Pynchonian clash of 'high' and 'low': Lenore drives a 'red toy car' made by 'Mattel', her father's wedding ring is exchanged for a 'Lone Ranger decoder ring', and at one point *Looney Tunes* is subjected to a dense philosophical reading.⁹² Similar appositions define much of Wallace's canon as a whole, from the Eschaton episode in *Infinite Jest* to *The Pale King's* description of IRS agents travelling around in a repurposed ice-cream truck. Whilst these reach for the same irreverence of his postmodernist 'patriarchs', however, they also betray Wallace's anxieties for a culture that invites adults to remain 'childish' and vilifies any kind of 'adult' seriousness or authority.⁹³ The millennial American culture seen in *Infinite Jest* is seen to be quite literally 'toxic' in its regression; the garbage hurled into the Great Concavity creates infants the size of adults, and discussions between the FBI agent Helen Steeply and the Canadian terrorist Remy Marathe constantly recapitulate the image of a child wanting to eat 'nothing but candy' when discussing the limits of U.S. neoliberalism.⁹⁴ Even the 'lethally entertaining' titular film at the centre of the novel enacts, essentially, a return to infancy, depicting 'Madame Psychosis as the Death-Mother' leant over a cot 'explaining to the camera as audience-synecdoche that this was why mothers were so obsessively, consumingly, drivenly, and yet somehow narcissistically loving of you, their kid'.⁹⁵ Here, the 'childish' has become less a tool of political resistance than an excuse to detach oneself from the outside world and retreat into a world of 'Too Much Fun', which, like the various forms of addiction that beset the novel's characters, merely privileges short-term fixes for what seems 'best at each individual moment'.⁹⁶ Wallace's novel emphasises that these quick fixes—like the father who feeds his child candy, or the flinging of waste into a neighbouring area—not only create a culture of selfishness, but will ultimately prove fatal for health and wellbeing in the long term.

⁹² Ibid., pp.44, 159, 195, 394.

⁹³ McCaffrey, 'An Expanded Interview', p.48.

⁹⁴ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, pp.321, 428-9,

⁹⁵ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, pp.788-9.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp.429, 235.

The satirical dimension of *Infinite Jest*'s 'near future' America hints toward the political implications of this communal retreat into childhood. Recalling Lasch and Postman (both of whom Wallace is known to have read) the mediatized consumer culture of Wallace's novel renders all political events with the gravity of Mario's puppet-show; the effect is to 'trivialise the idea of Political Man, to erode the difference between adult-like and childlike understanding' of public events.⁹⁷ In such a political milieu, celebrities and television stars are more likely to be elected President than serious leaders of state—hence the showbiz presidency of Johnny Gentle, which looks back to the Reagan presidency and anticipates Trump. The result of political disengagement, of course, is the kind of incompetence that begets apocalyptic disaster; the comic dimensions of *Infinite Jest* belie the extent to which its depictions of environmental catastrophe, imminent war, and international terrorism can be read as an acerbic depiction of 'neoliberal dystopia', as Ralph Clare notes.⁹⁸ The political sense of the novel comes to define Wallace's next novel *The Pale King*, eventually published posthumously after the author's 2008 suicide. In the story of Chris Fogle, aptly placed at the novel's centre by editor Michael Pietsch, the character recounts being 'a child trying to sort of passively rebel' until he learned to develop some initiative and direction in [his] life'.⁹⁹ For perhaps the clearest time, Wallace invites the connection between 'childishness', postmodernist experimentation, and the political fallout of the 1960s. The year of great change in Chris Fogle's life is 1978, marking the character out as a Boomer reaching adolescence at the same time as Wallace: though too young to participate in the actual political flashpoints of the 1960s, he inherits a love of psychedelic rock music, marijuana and a 'physical feeling of hatred' for all things 'commercial'.¹⁰⁰ The irony of this stance, he comes to realise, is that by as early as the mid-seventies these lifestyle choices had become wholly 'conformist' themselves—recalling an earlier conversation between his friends about the commercialization of the counterculture.¹⁰¹

The novel's depiction of the afterlife of countercultural values in US consumer culture recapitulates theories voiced by Thomas Frank, Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter. Essentially, the long Sixties' 'exaggerated fear of conformity' (in this case, the fear of the 'adult') not only left radicals unable to meaningfully collectivize, but fostered an obsession with 'rebellion [...] that

⁹⁷ Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, pp.106-7.

⁹⁸ Ralph Clare, 'The Politics of Boredom and the Boredom of Politics in David Foster Wallace's *The Pale King*', *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 44, No. 4, (Winter 2012), pp.428-446 (p.436).

⁹⁹ David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King: An Unfinished Novel* (London: Penguin, 2012), pp.174-5.

¹⁰⁰ Wallace, *Pale King*, pp.164-8,

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp.132-51

has for decades been the driving force of the marketplace'.¹⁰² This is, of course, one of the staple theories of the postmodern economy provided by Jameson; given that late capitalism 'ends up penetrating and colonizing' all previously successful 'footholds for critical effectivity', any stable position of critique becomes impossible.¹⁰³ From this standpoint, Chris Fogle's narrative testifies to the co-optation (and exhaustion) of the 'childish', which has by now been drained of its positive connotations: when Fogle is caught smoking marijuana he feels not rebellious but 'like a spoiled little selfish child'; later, his father is killed in a bizarre train accident with Fogle slouching behind 'like a dawdling child'.¹⁰⁴ Fogle's epiphanic realisation in 1978, then—and part of Wallace's essential project as an author—thus hinges on the need for a generation of children to 'grow up', and 'put away childish things'.¹⁰⁵ In perhaps Wallace's clearest act of 'patricide', the real act of rebellion comes by embracing the world of government bureaucracy; after Fogle fatalistically stumbles across an Advanced Tax Lecture, which warns of 'the death of childhood's limitless possibility', he is led toward the 'true heroism' of an anonymous job in a rural IRS office.¹⁰⁶ Wallace recognizes that, in a world where the celebration of 'childishness' now bolsters the consumer culture to which early postmodernists showed such contempt, the real act of 'rebellion' might come from the stoic acceptance of personal responsibility and civic duty, a kind of courage that 'receives no ovation [and] entertains no one'.¹⁰⁷

This is not to say that the 'adult' represents, for Wallace, a comfortable alternative to the 'childish'. Even compared to the bleak vision of maturity implied by authors in previous chapters, the thought of entering the adult world does seem to evoke a particular psychological horror for Wallace: almost identical sections discussing children's nightmares about their parents in the short stories 'B.I. # 42' and 'The Soul is Not A Smithy' and Chapter 23 of *The Pale King* picture adulthood as a lifetime of sitting at 'rows of foreshortened faces' at 'large, grey steel

¹⁰² Ibid., pp.130, 327; Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *The Rebel Sell: How the Counterculture Became Consumer Culture* (Sussex: Capstone, 2006), p.102.

¹⁰³ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), pp.49-50. See also Wallace's simpler formation: 'how is one to be a bona fide iconoclast when [even] Burger King sells Onion Rings with "Sometimes You Gotta Break the Rules"?' Wallace, 'E Unibus Pluram', p.68.

¹⁰⁴ Wallace, *Pale King*, p.173, p.201

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp.174-5.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.231

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

desks'.¹⁰⁸ Faced with the slow advance of this bureaucratic dystopia, it is little wonder that his work so often comes back to the difficulties of 'growing up':

[Edward Rand] said there is a particular kind of stage of life where you get cut off from the, like, unself-conscious happiness and magic of childhood—he said only seriously disturbed or autistic children are without this childhood joy—but later in life and puberty it's possible to leave that childhood freedom and completeness behind but still remain totally immature. Immature in the sense of wanting some magical daddy or rescuer to see you and really know and understand you and care as much about you as a child's parents do, and save you.¹⁰⁹

These words, relayed by Meredith Rand to Shane Drinion in one of *The Pale King's* last scenes, touch on a few prominent aspects of Wallace's depiction of childhood. Like the last chapter, we see a fascination with children who are 'disturbed or autistic', and who thereby miss out on the simpler pleasures of childhood.¹¹⁰ In addition, the association of happiness with 'unself-conscious[ness]' (which recalls Lacanian theories about child development, particularly the oft-quoted 'mirror phrase'), is significant given his emphasis on cultural solipsism, which he seems to imply is rooted in the sense of a coherent self acquired in early childhood.¹¹¹ Again, this implies that much of Wallace's sense of cultural malaise is associated with arrested development, which here folds into the essential (albeit painful) need to grow out of the childish expectation for 'Too Much Fun' and embrace the selflessness with which Wallace characterises the true ethical imperatives of everyday life.¹¹² It is in the ascetic denial of childish pleasure, and acceptance of oftentimes dull 'adult' routines and responsibilities—a move recognized as increasingly alien to a culture of instant gratification—that Wallace's novels suggest we can find a more meaningful relationship to ourselves and others.

Through Pynchon and Wallace's canon we can trace much of the changing face of the 'childish' adult through the latter decades of the twentieth century. In the same way that Wallace suggests that the references to television in fiction were, by the '80s and '90s, needed 'just to be plain realistic', we can similarly contextualize the blurring of 'adult' and 'child' in reference to

¹⁰⁸ See David Foster Wallace, 'B.I. #42', in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (London: Abacus, 2001), pp.73-7; David Foster Wallace, 'The Soul is Not A Smithy', in *Oblivion: Stories* (London: Abacus, 2014), pp.67-113 (p.103); Wallace, *Pale King*, p.255.

¹⁰⁹ Wallace, *Pale King*, p.500.

¹¹⁰ Wallace, *Pale King*, p.500.

¹¹¹ Marshall Boswell has stressed the importance of Lacanian psychology to Wallace's work, particularly *Infinite Jest*. See Marshall Boswell, *Understanding David Foster Wallace* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), pp.128-31.

¹¹² David Foster Wallace, *This is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2009), pp.89-90.

contemporaneous shifts in American culture; when Pynchon was writing his earliest novels, comic books and cartoons were still stringently censored for ‘adult’ content, whereas Wallace’s canon was written amid a backdrop of graphic novels that appeared on the New York Times bestseller list, and companies whose investment in children’s culture had made them amongst the wealthiest in America. It is clear that the forms of cultural consumption enjoyed by children and adults have become increasingly entangled over the last fifty years, and that, though perhaps once an invitation toward irreverence and irony, is also the result of a market logic that found consumers across ages, and found profit in the repackaging of familiar and vibrant material from adult consumers’ youth. In this sense, Pynchon and Wallace prove prescient in judging the increasing ‘nostalgia boom’ of the later twentieth century, which seems to have only sped up into the twenty-first; Pynchon’s *Bleeding Edge*, for instance, is set amid the ‘instant nostalgia’ of the early 2000s, and worries that characters’ immersion in cultural touchstones from the 1980s and ‘90s (from *SpongeBob SquarePants* to *Pokémon*) ‘has a darker subtext of denial’.¹¹³ This view of the past tessellates with Booker’s notion of a ‘postmodern nostalgia’, a form of remembering which is less about a genuine engagement with an actual past than a means by which to re-apprehend its commodified cultural forms—in Pynchon’s case, ‘what passes for nostalgia in age of widespread Attention Deficit Disorder’.¹¹⁴ There is a sense that the genuinely recuperative or communal dimensions of the ‘childish’ (and of nostalgia more broadly) have been despoiled by their co-optation by the late capitalist economy, and Wallace’s canon does much to clarify this process. The image par excellence of this kind of masturbatory nostalgia is the film cartridge *Infinite Jest*, whose return to infancy will indeed give you endless pleasure, but only at the cost of a retreat from all sense of the real ethical and political imperatives of everyday life; now, the ‘childish’ seems less an invitation toward animacy than surrender to consumer stasis, and the real problem seems to be how to move beyond this state of arrested development.

Childhood Trauma and the Crisis of Historicity

The developmental difficulties seen in Wallace’s canon prove prescient to much broader anxieties about maturation in postmodernist literature. Here, Wallace proves a useful pivot point in this chapter, since his characters’ arrested development often reflects less the cultural imperatives of late capitalism than the lingering influence of childhood trauma; throughout his

¹¹³ Thomas Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge* (London: Vintage, 2014), p.302.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

canon, almost all of his characters' reminiscences of youth coincide with formative trauma or abuse, from Lunt and Julie's abandonment as children to Toni Ware's experience watching the murder of her mother.¹¹⁵ The extent of childhood suffering is so prodigious in *Infinite Jest*, meanwhile, that it would be impracticable to list: suffice to say, the trials of more peripheral characters reflect Bruce Gately's experience of an alcoholic mother and abusive stepfather, and the suicide of James Incandenza II, which casts a shadow over the life of his children. Such incidents (whilst often tending toward black humour) key into Wallace's empathetic literary project, allowing a reader the vista to see the similarly painful pasts that beset characters of all corners of American life. Yet these moments also betray an interest in formative trauma that runs throughout much postmodernism as a whole; hinted at during my second chapter, depictions of childhood suffering often focus on the afterlife of this suffering in adult life, and authors like Vonnegut, Heller, Acker and Morrison show perhaps surprising overlaps in their focus upon adult characters with past trauma. The focus on these patterns of abuse reveals the influence of a few contemporaneous discourses around trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), but also keys into postmodernists' view of history, teleology and narrative more broadly.¹¹⁶

On the former point, we might note the influence of theories popularized by psychological study and self-help literature. Though Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was not theorized as such until 1980, for instance, it was informed by theories of 'battle fatigue' and 'war neurosis' that had become popular during WWII and the Korean War, and the 'post-Vietnam syndrome' identified among returning troops in the 1960s and '70s. Critics like Susanne Vees-Gulani and Manuela López Ramírez have read characters like Billy Pilgrim from *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), Shadrack from *Sula* (1973), and the institutionalized soldiers of *Catch-22* in proximity to such psychiatric conditions; Pilgrim's tendency to become 'unstuck in time', for instance, becomes a manifestation of Judith Herman's observation that returning P.O.Ws undergo a 'rupture in continuity between the past and the present [which] frequently persists even after the prisoner is released'.¹¹⁷ As has been discussed, Vonnegut's catalogue of 'traumatized and

¹¹⁵ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, pp.301, 433, 580-1, 628, 639-43, 649-50, 684-5, 776.

¹¹⁶ My broad understanding of trauma as related to our historical moment is indebted to Roger Luckhurst, whose work provides an in-depth treatment of trauma and fiction that is beyond the scope of this chapter. See Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2008).

¹¹⁷ Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), p.89; see also See Susanne Vees-Gulani, 'Diagnosing Billy Pilgrim: A Psychiatric Approach to Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (2003),

emotionally damaged' characters testify not just to the horrors of wartime but more quotidian anxieties, and we can note a 'shift [in] defining psychological trauma' in the decades that followed, by which epidemiological evidence steadily 'accumulate[d] that a majority of adults experience traumatic events', and that psychological trauma can be defined 'without any qualifications about its normalcy or abnormality'.¹¹⁸ By the 1980s and '90s, a series of self-help literature by authors like Charles Whitfield and Hugh Missildine broadened the notion of childhood trauma to the population at large; whilst these 'adult-child' or 'inner child' studies were often aimed at survivors of addiction or abuse, Marilyn Ivy is right to note that many of these publications' emphasis upon 'the lost inner child of the addicted [...] includes the vast majority of the population'.¹¹⁹ As Whitfield opined, 'since up to 95 per cent of families are dysfunctional, we're all children either doing our work of recovery or in need of it', and the need to move beyond past trauma is common to adults as a whole.¹²⁰ Albeit often couched in distinctly less than clinical terms, these self-help books mirror some epidemiological studies of ACEs, which have similarly found that a majority of adults report experience 'at least one adversity' in youth, and that adults who had experienced 'one or more early-life adversities were at greater risk for substance abuse, mental illness, and perpetrating violence' than others.¹²¹ Importantly, given these risks, adults with these 'symptoms of trauma may perpetuate the same ACEs to the next generation, giving rise to the intergenerational cycle of these exposures' through time.¹²²

Whilst depictions of childhood trauma do, then, betray a contemporary 'obsession with "painful childhoods"'—which Wallace, for one, would treat in both 'The Depressed Person' and the 'Inner Infant' episode of *Infinite Jest*—they also provide useful ways for us to think about postmodernist anxieties toward the past more generally. Tellingly, accounts of history in the postmodern age are voiced in the language of individual mental illness; Fredric Jameson talks of

pp.175-184 (p.177); and Rolf Kleber, Charles Figley, and Berthold Gersons, (eds), *Beyond Trauma: Cultural and Societal Dynamics*, (New York: Plenum, 1995), pp.1-2; Kevin Brown, 'The Psychiatrists Were Right: Anomic Alienation in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*', *South Central Review*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer 2011), pp.101-109; and Manuela López Ramírez, 'The Shell-Shocked Veteran in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Home*' *Atlantis*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (June 2016), pp.129-147.

¹¹⁸ Julian D. Ford, *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Scientific and Professional Dimensions* (Burlington, MA: Academic Press, 2009), p.12; Lawrence Broer, *Sanity Plea: Schizophrenia in the Novels of Kurt Vonnegut* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), p.4.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.235.

¹²⁰ Charles Whitfield, quoted in Marilyn Ivy, 'Have You Seen Me? Recovering the Inner Child in Late Twentieth-Century America', *Social Text*, No. 37 (Winter, 1993), pp.227-252.

¹²¹ Dube, 'Twenty Years and Counting', pp.3-4.

¹²² Waite and Ryan, *ACEs*, p.42.

¹²³ Wallace, 'The Depressed Person', in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, pp.31-58 (p.32).

postmodernist 'schizophrenia', for instance, a medical term which (like PTSD) is prevalent in the literary analysis of characters like Billy Pilgrim, Slothrop, Pecola, and Janey Smith. Jameson's account of 'schizophrenia' broadens his focus away from the dissolution of identity, however, toward a more general experience of 'the breakdown of the relationship between signifiers', touching both poststructuralist theory and Baudrillardian accounts of hyperreality.¹²⁴ Interestingly, Jameson frames this in terms of the 'failure of the infant to accede fully into the realm of speech and language', recalling familiar anxieties about maturation and making an important connection between linguistic and temporal collapse:

Schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence. The schizophrenic thus does not know personal identity in our sense, since our feeling of identity depends on our sense of the persistence of the "I" and the "me" over time. On the other hand, the schizophrenic will clearly have a far more intense experience of any given present of the world than we do, since our own present is always part of some larger set of projects which force us selectively to focus our perceptions. [...] The schizophrenic is thus given over to an undifferentiated vision of the world in the present, a by no means pleasant experience.¹²⁵

Here, Jameson's identification of an 'undifferentiated vision of the world in the present' tessellates with his association of postmodern consumer society with a 'weakening of historicity' more broadly. As Andreas Huyssen notes, this diagnosis of 'cultural amnesia' is hardly new, and bears the mark of Adornian critiques of a culture industry of 'unending sameness' in the 1950s, but reach a particular height amid a homogenizing late capitalist economy seen in the last chapter.¹²⁶ Critiques of postmodernity's crisis of history—seen most clearly with Fukuyama's famous assertion of 'the end of history' in the 1990s—make the essential recognition that this lack of historical sense is not mutually exclusive with the culture of nostalgia traced in the first half of this chapter.¹²⁷ As Huyssen notes, it is 'the waning of history and historical consciousness' that the past becomes discoverable to us only in rituals of collective remembering, and in a proliferation of glib 'nostalgia trips' rooted in simulacral advertising imagery and politically expedient stereotypes.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1983), pp.111-25 (p.120).

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp.99-100; see also Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).

¹²⁷ Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest*, No. 16 (1989), pp.3-18 (p.3)

¹²⁸ Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, p.5, 88-9.

Whilst perhaps necessitated by a homogenizing late capitalist economy, this crisis of historicity bears clear political implications. As seen in my second chapter, postmodernist writers often return to the ‘evil nonsense’ children are taught in history classes as a locus of ‘adult’ control, professing the ideological arrangements inherent in any interpretation of the past.¹²⁹ In blurring ‘the events, structures and processes of the past’ with ‘the forms of documentary representation, the conceptual and political appropriations, and the historical discourses that construct them’, works of historiographic metafiction like *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* testify not only to the psychological discontinuity of their characters but the inability to bear witness to the past as a kind of factual or teleological continuity.¹³⁰ In one sense, postmodernism’s aversion toward history (and many historians’ subsequent aversion to postmodernism), thereby simply works to undermine the ‘immanent progressive teleology derived from the Enlightenment’, and confirms Walter Benjamin’s famous notion of the past as ‘one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage’, as Michael Newman notes.¹³¹ Yet this scepticism toward history ultimately recognizes that organizing the past into historical narrative is an inevitably political act, and that conventional ‘histories’ are thereby of use to give national and political identities coherence. As Reverend Cherrycoke professes in Pynchon’s *Mason and Dixon*, ‘History’ must be ‘tended lovingly and honourably by fabulists and counterfeiters, Ballad-Mongers and Cranks of ev’ry Radius’, to protect it from being ‘hir’d, or coer’cd, only in Interests that must ever prove base’.¹³² One feels that this provides not only a useful account of the zany elements of Pynchon’s historiographic metafiction (which too often ‘speaks in children’s rhymes’ to defamiliarize events of the past), but also a recognition of the essential ethical and political implications of wresting historical narrative away from the powerful interests which might reify it in their own image.¹³³

¹²⁹ Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions* (London: Vintage, 2000), p.11.

¹³⁰ Patrick Joyce, ‘History and Postmodernism’, *Past and Present*, No. 133, (November 1991), pp.204-209 (p.207); see also Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York & London: Routledge, 1988), pp.153-4; Lawrence Stone and Gabrielle M. Spiegel, ‘History and Post-Modernism’, *Past & Present*, No. 135 (May, 1992), pp.189-208; Trygve R. Tholfsen, ‘Postmodern theory of History: A Critique’, *Memoria y Civilización*, No. 2 (1999), pp.203-222.

¹³¹ Michael Newman, ‘Suffering from Reminiscences’, in Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (eds.), *Postmodernism and the Re-Reading of Modernity* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp.84-114 (pp.94-5); Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007 (pp.257-8); Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage, 1994), pp.465.

¹³² Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, p.350.

¹³³ Ibid.

This kind of historical scepticism illuminates a series of postmodernist texts by Toni Morrison and Louise Erdrich that like Nancy J. Peterson and Marni Gauthier have called ‘counterhistories’, speaking truth to power by ‘revising nationalist histories and mythologies’, ‘(re)making national mythic history’, and tracing microhistories which might illuminate painful corners of the American past.¹³⁴ Though Peterson prefers to label such texts as ‘postmodern histories’, inasmuch as their attempt to uncover ‘true’ histories seems distinct from Hutcheon’s emphasis on the presence of the fictive in historiographic metafiction, she does note that such histories must start from a position of scepticism, itself an act of rebellion against a ‘mainstream American history [that] is so relentlessly optimistic and teleological that it has become painfully difficult to articulate counterhistories that do not share these values’.¹³⁵ Particularly in conjunction with the portrayal of characters with disruptive childhood trauma, these texts thereby become ‘trauma fictions’ (as Anne Whitehead has it), alluding to Eyerman’s famous notion of ‘cultural trauma’, and Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart’s of ‘historical trauma’, a ‘cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences’.¹³⁶ Here, the desire to uncover and redress individual moments of suffering mirrors the attempt to uncover wider histories of suffering that are often elided or effaced in conventional American histories, and thereby undo both kinds of ‘repression’. Adopting Jameson’s adage that ‘history is what hurts’, Peterson argues that such texts’ desire to uncover historical trauma is itself a radical act in a culture whose only engagement with history comes in the form of nostalgia; even if this involves reliving or reviving trauma, this ‘hurt’ can be of use to disrupt cultural hegemonies and bear witness to continued oppression in the present.¹³⁷ After all, the postmodern scepticism inscribed in Benjamin’s Angel of History need not lead to a nihilistic repudiation of any historical progress, as Newman argues, but a rejection of ‘progress without solidarity’, interrupting ‘one moment and its [...] projective continuity, [...] including its potential for happiness which has been cut short’.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Marni Gauthier, *Amnesia and Redress in Contemporary American Fiction* (London and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), pp.24-6; Nancy J. Peterson, *Against Amnesia: Contemporary Women Writers and the Crises of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

¹³⁵ Peterson, *Against Amnesia*, pp.1-2.

¹³⁶ See Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber, *Race, Trauma and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010); Payel Pal, ‘Disrupted Childhoods: A Critical Study of Toni Morrison’s *Love*’, *The Criterion*, Vol. 8, No. 8 (July 2017), pp.366-373; Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, ‘The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and Its Relationship with Substance Abuse: A Lakota Illustration’, *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, Vol. 35, No.1 (2003) pp.7-13 (pp.7-8).

¹³⁷ See *Ibid.*, and Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p.88.

¹³⁸ Newman, ‘Suffering from Reminiscences’, p.95.

The use of childhood trauma to speak to the hegemonic narratives of American culture tessellates with much of my argument in 'The Preterite Child', which noted the prominence of childhood suffering in Morrison's work. Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* series (which tells the sweeping history of a series of Ojibwe families amid real historical flashpoints in Native American history) similarly shows children beset on all sides by suffering: Fleur, Pauline, Marie, Lulu, Lipsha, Karl, Mary and Delphine are variously orphaned or abandoned before puberty; June and Howard are brought up in households of abuse and alcoholism; and Marie and Fleur are implied to have lost several infants to sickness. Like Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Erdrich also asks how such 'peripheral girlhoods' can survive their apprehension of alterity; young June Morrissey is almost hanged 'playing cowboys' when re-enacting a lynching she saw 'in the movies', whilst both Pauline and her daughter Marie reject their Native American heritage as a devilish stain on their newfound Christian identity.¹³⁹ The scenes of the two teenage girls self-flagellating with scalding kettles do recall Rikki Ducornet's use of convent life to show a juncture of bodily and discursive 'child abuse', but also analogise the steady erasure of Native American customs by Christian missionaries.¹⁴⁰ The titular 'tracks' of Erdrich's third novel that lead back to the root of the community's suffering in Erdrich's third novel settle upon the rising steeples of Catholics, Lutherans and Episcopalians, which 'competed for the [...] souls' of the communities' citizens as if a business transaction.¹⁴¹ The lineage seen in *Tracks*, which also depicts the appropriation of Native American lands by government schools, churches, banks, and lumbering businesses at the start of the twentieth century, provides much-needed context to the painful individual histories that punctuate the novel. Its narration is, indeed, framed around dual childhood traumas: Nanapush's sections are addressed to Lulu Lamartine, to explicate her mother Fleur's decision to send her away to a government boarding school; whilst Pauline Puyat's desire to be white ultimately leads to a Puritanical fanaticism that terrorizes Marie and Zelda in *Love Medicine*. As Pauline and Marie's virtually identical experiences illustrate, the 'tracks' of the novel not only uncover those 'invisible' ancestors and forces from which characters descend, but identify how these traumas persist and repeat in the present.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine* (London: Flamingo, 1994), pp.21, 89-90.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.49-53.

¹⁴¹ Louise Erdrich, *Tracks* (New York: Henry Holt, 1988), pp.13-14.

¹⁴² Erdrich, *Tracks*, pp.1-2.

Erdrich's fragmented style, which jumps back and forth through narrators, households, and decades, testifies to the inability to formulate a coherent 'history' of these families, and to the unavailability of continuities from the past. As mentioned, adverse childhood experiences can act not only to 'prevent the development of [...] an integrated identity' in individual adults, but can also cause 'intergenerational trauma', as adults 'replicate [their] experiences in [their] offspring'.¹⁴³ Consonantly, King's childhood experience of living with an alcoholic father and abused mother is repeated in King's violent relationship with Lynette, which King Jr. has to endure. Erdrich explicitly connotes this with a state of arrested development—King's voice 'sounds childish even to [his] child'—and though King Jr. tries to distance himself from his family name, his attempts to turn his father into the police mirror King's own testimony against Gordie years earlier.¹⁴⁴ Elsewhere, the depiction of June's rape at the outset of *Love Medicine* is given new colouring by the description of June being raped as a child by her stepfather in *The Bingo Palace*. That novel's depiction of a ghostly June appearing to Gordie and Lyman proves apt for a series beset by hauntings and revenants: as well as June, Fleur drowns several times as a child yet somehow survives, Moses' faked death as a child means that he lives on 'dead, a ghost', and Nector reappears to Marie weeks after his death.¹⁴⁵ As Kathleen Brogan notes, the multiple hauntings of the novel represent 'cultural invisibility' but also 'cultural continuity', particularly since 'in the context of traditional Chippewa religion [...] the living and the dead participate in one integrated reality'.¹⁴⁶ Whilst Erdrich's novels acknowledge the extent to which the heritage of Native American communities has been steadily eroded by governmental policy and forced assimilation (like the reservation land that is 'sold to whites and [...] lost forever'), the ghosts of this inheritance also provide a way to apprehend the vast communal histories in which they participate.¹⁴⁷ Analogised in the 'tangled bloodlines' at the novels' core, these entanglements of past and present show characters to be implicated in greater histories than their immediate memories or experience, even if many characters (like Albertine, Lyman and Marie) often feel disconnected from their Ojibwe roots.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Waite and Ryan, *ACEs*, p.42.

¹⁴⁴ Erdrich, *Love Medicine*, pp.330-31.

¹⁴⁵ Erdrich, *Tracks*, pp.10-11, 74-5; *Love Medicine*, p.255.

¹⁴⁶ Kathleen Brogan, 'Haunted by History: Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*', *Prospects*, Vol. 21, 1996, pp.169-192 (p.170).

¹⁴⁷ Erdrich, *Love Medicine*, p.12.

¹⁴⁸ Louise Erdrich, *The Bingo Palace* (New York: Perennial, 2001), p.17.

Importantly, this sense of continuity does more than simply show the dialectic of ‘trauma’ and ‘heritage’ that punctuates characters’ remembrances of the past. Like Toni Morrison, Louise Erdrich is also keenly aware of more immediate contingencies; their depiction of young orphans functions less as an Ackerian pastiche of the Dickensian child than a recognition that the desperate poverty seen in nineteenth-century social realism has lasted well into the twentieth and beyond. Just as Marie has to adopt so many ‘mouths [that she] couldn’t feed’ them all, her daughter Zelda must eventually raise Albertine alone in a single trailer, and Dot must bring her two-week-old daughter to work with her.¹⁴⁹ The entanglements of ‘child’ and ‘adult’ in Fleur, Pauline and June meanwhile, stems not only from the legacy of childhood trauma, but the fact that they are thrown into the role of motherhood whilst still in their teenage years, and must care for children whilst having no experience of their parents. In such cases, continuity of trauma is seen not only as a site of repeated mental distress and painful remembrances, but a recognition of the difficulty in breaking the chain of material poverty, abandonment and substance abuse that plagues her characters; Nanapush’s recognition that ‘power travels in the bloodlines, handed out before birth’ reminds us that the varied socioeconomic landscape in which these families must be situated in continuation from a past of persecution and exploitation.¹⁵⁰ This is felt particularly in Native American populations whose experience of colonial ‘occupation [...] has never ended’, as Seema Kurup and Nancy Van Styvenhale note, and their witnessing of the continued growth of the United States on Native American soil brings into question ‘the assumption of trauma as rooted in event, where “event” is understood to refer to a distinct experience that happens in one specific location and time’.¹⁵¹ Such continuing occupation leaves Erdrich’s characters in an impossible bind; paradoxically, the only way to physically survive for these Ojibwe families is to increasingly shed the practices and beliefs that give their Ojibwe identity coherence. Thus Margaret and Fleur’s decision to let government schools take their children seems less a testament to the evil of a normative education but a grim recognition of the impossibility of childrearing in extreme poverty—like Sethe’s decision to slaughter her own children in *Beloved*, even the totalizing term ‘child abuse’ (which oftentimes seems to radiate such moral clarity) is given a more relative inflexion.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Erdrich, *Love Medicine*, pp.24-5, 85-6; 211.

¹⁵⁰ Erdrich, *Tracks*, pp.31, 170. For more studies on Erdrich’s presentation of family lineage, see E. Shelley Reid, ‘The Stories We Tell: Louise Erdrich’s Identity Narratives’, *MELUS*, vol. 25, No. 3-4 (Autumn-Winter 2000), pp.65-86; and Gary Storhoff, ‘Family Systems in Louise Erdrich’s *The Beet Queen*’, *Critique*, Vol .39, No. 4 (1998), pp.341-352.

¹⁵¹ Seema Kurup, *Understanding Louise Erdrich* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2015), p.7; Nancy Van Styvendale, ‘The Trans/Historicity of Trauma in Jeanette Armstrong’s *Slash* and Sherman Alexie’s *Indian Killer*’, *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 40, No. 1/2, (Spring & Summer 2008), pp.203-223 (p.203).

¹⁵² See Erdrich, *Love Medicine*, p.19; and *Tracks*, p.219.

Erdrich's focus on the continuities and omissions from the past, particularly through the presentation of ghosts, makes her a natural literary companion to the work of Toni Morrison. Like Erdrich's depiction of the physical, economic and epistemological violence levelled against Native American communities, Morrison's depiction of chattel slavery in *Beloved* intertwines individual and collective trauma; Sethe's separation from her mother, Denver's youth in jail, and the dead child who 'haunts' the novel, are directly resultant from slavery's predication 'on the absence of a nuclear black home or family', and more immediate consequences of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act.¹⁵³ These characters' experience of individual moments of trauma imply much wider systems of suffering (as Paul D's memories of wearing an iron bit and working in a chain gang) and history of oppression by which these characters can reflect upon the lineage of the transatlantic slave trade (as *Beloved*'s nightmare 'rememorying' of the journey through the Middle Passage). Such moments do provide 'a reminder that the past can never really be past [...] because it is always already living alongside the present' in the form of memories, but also testify to the extent to which these memories are triggered by psychological disturbance in the present, as Manuela López Ramírez reminds us.¹⁵⁴ As in Erdrich's work, then, characters' remembrances of past trauma provides not only a space to uncover repressed and censored counterhistories, but to associate 'the tribulations and emotional turmoil' of traumatized adults with 'the tensions of the society they [...] live in' day to day.¹⁵⁵ Morrison's depiction of lingering and repeating trauma in individual characters thereby mirrors the experience of whole disenfranchised communities, both in terms of the cultural and historical trauma of American racism, and the ongoing patterns of violence and exclusion rooted in this history.

As well as *Beloved*'s presentation of the ways in which 'slavery [...] resurfaces in the lives and actions of the protagonists', Morrison's next two novels *Jazz* (1991) and *Paradise* (1997) are of particular importance.¹⁵⁶ Given their shared 'focus on the relationship of history, memory, and story [...] in the survival of African Americans in the United States', critics like John N. Duvall

¹⁵³ Schreiber, *Race, Trauma, and Home*, p.34; see also Dana Heller, 'Reconstructing Kin: Family, History, and Narrative in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*', *College Literature*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (June 1994), pp.105-117; and Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, 'Daughters Signifyin[g] History: The Example of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*', in William Andrews and Nellie McKay (eds.), *Toni Morrison's Beloved: A Casebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.37-66.

¹⁵⁴ Teresa Heffernan, 'Beloved and the Problem of Mourning', *Studies in the Novel*, Winter 1998, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Winter 1998), pp.558-73 (p.561); Ramírez, 'The Shell-Shocked Veteran'.

¹⁵⁵ Ramírez, 'The Shell-Shocked Veteran', p.130.

¹⁵⁶ Whitehead, *Trauma Fictions*, p.85.

and Justine Tally have analysed these works as a loose trilogy, and all of them work to counterpoint black histories to more myopic and idealistic visions of America's past.¹⁵⁷ Like much historiographic metafiction, both *Jazz* and *Paradise* are also acutely aware of the elisions and biases that accompany any account of the past; the former novel's unnamed narrator repeatedly testifies to their own unreliability, qualifying their accounts of the past with 'If I remember right', and outright admitting that they 'invented stories' about the stories' protagonists and 'fill[ed] in their lives'.¹⁵⁸ Similarly in *Paradise*, Patricia's attempt to trace a history of the all-black town of Ruby apart from its 'official history, elaborated in pulpits, in Sunday school classes and ceremonial speeches' runs into problems when 'parents complained about their children being asked' about their past, and families refuse to 'divulge what could be private information, secrets, even'.¹⁵⁹ Quickly, Patricia's history '[gives] up all pretense to objective comment', as she struggles to reconcile the nameless 'women with generalized last names', the mysterious 'footnotes, crevices and questions' about the town's founding families, and the various 'fragments of other families' that came with them.¹⁶⁰ Like Erdrich's series, the difficulty in tracing the entangled links between families and generations betrays a larger scepticism about being able to comfortably trace a collective past, especially when it is punctuated by such elisions and repressions.

This recognition is mirrored in the unclear pasts of *Jazz*'s major characters, whose memories of childhood tragedy and abandonment are framed as absence. Joe and Dorcas' illicit affair blossoms over a shared feeling of being orphaned at an early age, which leaves them with a 'nothing [they] travelled with' inside, whilst Golden Gray retrospectively describes growing up without a father to losing an arm, a 'singing pain' in 'the place where he should have been and was not'.¹⁶¹ Such blurring of physical and psychological trauma recalls Acker and Ducornet's focus on the intersections of bodily and discursive violence, but Morrison appreciates even more than these postmodernists the process by which discursive manoeuvres legitimate very real physical suffering. After all, the dogmatic isolationism of Ruby ultimately precipitates their bloody attack upon the Convent in *Paradise*, and the same racist logic that constructs slaves as

¹⁵⁷ Justine Tally, 'The Morrison Trilogy', in Justine Tally (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.75-91 (p.76); and John N. Duvall, *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), p.17.

¹⁵⁸ Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (New York: Plume, 1993), pp.71, 220.

¹⁵⁹ Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (New York: Plume, 1999), pp.187-8.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Morrison, *Jazz*, pp.38, 158.

‘trespassers amongst the human race’ in *Beloved* informs the brutal beatings, rapes, and murders that Sethe and Paul D fear to remember.¹⁶² Whilst this repressed trauma often recalls the Vonnegutian leaps in time that beset Billy Pilgrim—such as Sethe’s memory of recognizing her mother upon seeing Beloved, or the crying woman that periodically reminds Seneca of her abandonment in *Paradise*—Morrison emphasizes more clearly that they remain a ‘timeless present’, a continuous part of characters’ identity as they grow.¹⁶³ Sethe’s painful memories of Sweet Home are inscribed into her via the ‘chokecherry tree’ whipping scars on her back, just as the ‘old roads, avenues’ that trace Seneca’s patterns of self-harm all respond to the original cut that she received whilst being raped as a child.¹⁶⁴

Again, these disparate moments of individual trauma are given collective coherence by relation to historical trauma. For one, the protagonists’ ‘trauma of orphaned childhood [is] made more devastating by the racial terror to which they have borne witness’, meaning that the ‘return of the repressed’ is accompanied by the very real fear of violent reprisals, as Shirley Ann Stave notes.¹⁶⁵ Sethe’s house is not only haunted by the ghosts of her dead child, but assaulted by ‘whiteboys who pulled [the gate] down’, and Sethe continues to fear that she cannot give ‘her children [...] exactly what was missing in 124: safety’.¹⁶⁶ Yet the trilogy’s exploration of the past also deftly locates individual trauma with formative moments in American history; Dorcas’ parents are murdered after the East St Louis riots in 1917, for instance, and the memory of Dorcas’ silence during ‘two funerals in two days’ blurs into Alice Manfred’s account of the NAACP’s Silent Parade.¹⁶⁷ In *Paradise*, Seneca’s childhood experience of ‘knocking on every door’ to find that ‘most didn’t open’ mirrors the larger ‘Disallowing’ of Haven (the all-black town that preceded Ruby), in which a community of black families fleeing the South were ‘turned away by rich Choctaw and poor whites’, as well as new black towns, for being ‘too poor, too bedraggled-looking to enter’.¹⁶⁸ Suitably, the founding families of Haven are revealed to have included ‘orphans [...] who spotted the travelers and asked to join’, making it a town built upon outcasted children like Seneca, and Morrison tightly allies the history of the fictitious Haven to

¹⁶² Morrison, *Beloved*, p.148

¹⁶³ Ibid., p.217.

¹⁶⁴ Morrison, *Beloved*, p.18; *Paradise*, pp.260-61.

¹⁶⁵ Shirley Ann Stave, ‘Jazz and Paradise: Pivotal Moments in Black History’, in Justine Tally (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.59-74 (p.60).

¹⁶⁶ Morrison, *Beloved*, pp.192-3.

¹⁶⁷ Morrison, *Jazz*, pp.56-7; see also Jill Matus, *Toni Morrison* (Manchester and New York: University of Manchester Press, 1998), p.138.

¹⁶⁸ Morrison, *Paradise*, pp.125, 13-14.

the real fates of 'Downs, Lexington, Sapulpa, [...] Tulsa, Norman, Oklahoma City'.¹⁶⁹ Importantly, Morrison's tracing of characters' and communities' past (a form of 'literary archaeology', as she called it) allows her to re-centre the 'rarely mentioned Black westward expansion that paralleled the much more well-known white migration', and to bear witness to the various atrocities and exclusions that often accompanied such moments, but also to interrogate the ideological manoeuvres at play within any form of history-making.¹⁷⁰ The town of Ruby is not immune from the kind of biases and redactions that Morrison sees in other 'official histories'; 'the town's official story, elaborated from pulpits, in Sunday school classes and ceremonial speeches' informs even the children's Nativity story, which reconfigures the story of Mary and Joseph as analogous to the 'Disallowing' of the original Haven families.¹⁷¹ Recalling my second chapter, Morrison identifies children's culture as a key site of ideological transmission—as the Reverend Misner remarks of the play, the townsfolk will 'love [their] children to death' by inculcating them with their same distrust of outsiders, an 'isolation [that] kills generations'.¹⁷²

Like Erdrich, Morrison here recognizes that history-making is always a process of interpretation and re-interpretation, and that this process is tied up with systems of authority and power. Though the triumphalist history of Ruby as a 'safe haven' fosters pride amongst the town's '8-rock' inhabitants (those 'blue-black people' named for a 'deep deep level in the coal mines'), it is also used to legitimate their exclusion of light-skinned African Americans, and the violence they visit upon the variously 'impure' inhabitants of the nearby Convent.¹⁷³ Part of the importance of centring individual (and competing) stories within her counterhistories, then, is to avoid the kind of totalizing histories that might obscure, or even inhibit, individual experience. In *Paradise*, Patricia censures Richard's obsession with African pride for its elision of slavery—a trauma that 'is [America's] past' and 'nothing can change'—and yet Deacon Morgan recognizes the difficulty in centring these histories when 'Everybody born in slavery time wasn't a slave', and his own 'ex-slave' grandfather was also 'an ex-lieutenant governor, an ex-banker, an ex-deacon and a whole lot of other exes'.¹⁷⁴ Like Morrison's depiction of child suffering in *Sula* and

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.189, 112.

¹⁷⁰ Toni Morrison, 'The Site of Memory', in William Zinsser (ed.), *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, 2d ed. (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 83-102 (p.92); Shirley Ann Stave, 'Jazz and Paradise', pp.66-7.

¹⁷¹ Morrison, *Paradise*, pp.209-10.

¹⁷² Ibid., p.210.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., pp.210, 84.

The Bluest Eye, meanwhile, Dorcas' suffering as a child makes her not only fragile but 'bold', endowed with the same energy as the young female protagonists of her and Toni Cade Bambara's early work.¹⁷⁵ Morrison thereby refuses to submit to the kind of binary thinking that corrupts Ruby and Haven; the emphasis upon America's need to confront its historical repressions is tempered with the recognition that these black histories cannot be reduced to their traumas, and that past trauma, whilst always 'erupt[ing] into the present', does not necessarily define characters' futures:¹⁷⁶

I was sure one would kill the other [...] That the past was an abused record with no choice but to repeat itself at the crack and no power on earth could lift the arm that held the needle. [...] I believed I saw everything important they did, and based on what I saw I could imagine what I didn't: how exotic they were, how driven. Like dangerous children. That's what I wanted to believe. It never occurred to me that they were thinking other thoughts, feeling other feelings, putting their lives together in ways I never dreamed of.¹⁷⁷

The narrator's confession at the end of *Jazz*, in which Joe's, Violet's and Dorcas' story fails to fall into its predetermined pattern, provides an important reminder that the present need not 'repeat itself at the crack' of past trauma. It is a testament to the depth and nuance of her characters that Morrison ultimately reaffirms the strength of their inner lives; aside from the dangers implicit in affirming the authority of any 'master narrative', such a suprahuman vista is ultimately shown to be inadequate to the wealth of quotidian human experience.¹⁷⁸

Morrison's focus on the immediate circumstances of human lives need not be as platitudinous as an abstract affirmation of 'realistic' characters. As I suggested in my second chapter, the strength of her fiction ultimately lays in its reluctance to abstract; though Morrison shows a suitably postmodern focus on the structures of power/knowledge and incredulity toward metanarratives, her work is always grounded in the material contingency and physical welfare upon which psychological wellbeing is founded. The description of Violet's mute mother 'throw[ing] herself into a well' could seem a cartoonish image of childhood trauma reminiscent of Vonnegut or Wallace, but her suicide is shown to be rooted in the family's desperate poverty, after which Violet decides 'no small dark foot [should] rest on another while a hungry mouth

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p.61.

¹⁷⁶ Justine Baillie, *Toni Morrison and the Literary Tradition: The Invention of an Aesthetic* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.150.

¹⁷⁷ Morrison, *Jazz*, p.221.

¹⁷⁸ See also Marni Gauthier, 'The Other Side of *Paradise*: Toni Morrison's (Un)Making of Mythic History', *African American Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Fall, 2005), pp.395-414.

said, Mama?'.¹⁷⁹ Dorcas' self-narration of her murder is surely one of the most affecting passages in the postmodern canon, but her death is ultimately confirmed because Felice and the rest of the partygoers are too afraid to call the police.¹⁸⁰ Morrison's attention to such details transcends a theoretical engagement with the framing of American history, and functions on a more empathetic level to show how individuals exist within broader patterns of oppression and exclusion. Her tendency to foreground trauma functions, then, not only provides a retort to more idealistic histories of America, but simply bears witness to real suffering, an inherently ethical act. For one, this can speak truth to power in its simple affirmation that traumatic events really did occur—just as Seneca's adult self-harm responds not only to the pain of her childhood rape, but the fact that Mama Greer refused to believe it had happened.¹⁸¹ Yet Morrison also allows our re-apprehension of this suffering to acknowledge its human cost, and empowers us to voice our own ethical response. As Richard Misner remarks upon the 'unacceptable, incomprehensible death of a child' in *Paradise*, we should perhaps 'reject platitudes' in favour of but 'the questions that are really on our minds: Who could do this to a child? Who could permit this for a child? And why?'.¹⁸²

We may well agree with Nancy J. Peterson that such an invitation to stop, remember, and consider should be salutary to a culture of amnesia. This is particularly profound in an America whose conception of the past relies on its omissions; as Dalsgård and Gauthier have pointed out, popular histories of American exceptionalism rest theoretically on both 'a violent marginalization of its non-exceptionalist other', and a sanitized vision of history that still positions the United States as the 'city on the hill', an 'embodied state of innocence'.¹⁸³ Erdrich and Morrison's fiction provides a riposte to such idealized histories of America, whilst showing that any such utopian mythmaking—the titular 'paradise' of Morrison's most overtly metahistorical novel—rests upon structures of power/knowledge (as well as 'mechanisms of marginalization and violence') to reify and perpetuate it.¹⁸⁴ Here, Gauthier cites Homi Bhabha's suggestion that 'it is the will to nationhood that unifies historical memory and secures present-day consent'; America's vision of

¹⁷⁹ Morrison, *Jazz*, pp.101-2.

¹⁸⁰ See Morrison, *Jazz*, pp.187-193.

¹⁸¹ See Morrison, *Paradise*, p.261.

¹⁸² Ibid., p.295.

¹⁸³ Katherine Dalsgård, 'The one all-black town worth the pain: (African) American exceptionalism, historical narration, and the critique of nationhood in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*', *Oasis*, pp.233-58 (p.237); and Gauthier, 'The Other Side of *Paradise*', pp.395-6.

¹⁸⁴ Dalsgård, 'The one all-black town', p.246.

its historical past and political present are inevitably linked.¹⁸⁵ Reconfiguring this American past, including an attempt to re-centre elided voices and remember historical traumas (both suffered and committed by past Americans) thereby seems an overt attempt to secure a more equitable American future. This should alert us to the fact that a postmodernist incredulity toward teleological history does not necessarily coincide with a Jamesonian ‘endless present’ or Fukuyaman ‘end of history’, precisely because such homogenizations would fortify existing structures of privilege and oppression. Though Morrison and Erdrich interrogate America’s utopian self-mythologizing, they do not despair of ‘Paradise’ never being attained—as Magali Cornier Michael suggests, their novels suggest that with material and physical security, forms of coalition-building that emphasize community over homogeneity, and a focus on microhistories that might draw attention away from reified master narratives, there may yet be hope for individuals to find a ‘personal, non-national inner experience of bliss and solace’.¹⁸⁶

Adults/Children, Nostalgia/Trauma

In his exploration of *American Postmodernist Fiction and the Past*, Theophilus Savvas centres the discussion of Korsakoff’s Syndrome, also known as ‘amnesiac-confabulatory disorder’, in Don DeLillo’s *Underworld* (1997).¹⁸⁷ The condition, which causes both ‘memory loss and [...] compensatory gap-filling’, proves a useful metaphor for a novel focused both on the recovery and loss of the past; Nick Shay’s tracing of the forgotten history of the baseball struck in the famous ‘Shot Heard Around the World’ runs alongside his repressed memories of his lost father, his childhood murder of George Manza, and his youth in a juvenile detention facility.¹⁸⁸ Yet the dual narrative provides an even more apt expression of postmodernism’s various relationship to the past than even Savvas seems to give full credit—its dual expression of American feelings of nostalgia and trauma elucidates the essential relationship between them, and can help us form the concluding remarks to much of what has come before. The presentation of a nostalgic urge increasingly mined for commercial purposes, like the sports memorabilia Marvin predicts people will one day ‘pay fortunes for’, taps into the postmodern nostalgia seen in Thomas Pynchon and David Foster Wallace, who share DeLillo’s anxieties that such nostalgia fodder may just be another kind of ‘toxic waste’, that ‘melancholy junk from yesteryear’ seeping into every corner of

¹⁸⁵ See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p.229 ; and Gauthier, ‘The Other Side of Paradise’, p.398.

¹⁸⁶ Gauthier, ‘The Other Side of Paradise’, p.244.

¹⁸⁷ Theophilus Savvas, *American Postmodernist Fiction and the Past* (London and New York: MacMillan, 2011), pp.156-7.

¹⁸⁸ Savvas, *American Postmodernist Fiction and the Past*, p.156.

American culture.¹⁸⁹ Meanwhile, the novel is also keenly aware of the elisions of this nostalgia, such as Nick's repressed abandonment, Bronzini's own bedridden youth, and the Navaho families who 'worked in uranium mines' and had children born with missing limbs and cancer.¹⁹⁰ In moments like the famous opening of the novel, such moments of trauma and nostalgia even co-exist in single moments: October 3, 1951 is remembered both as the date of the 'Shot Heard Around the World' and the Soviet Union's successful test of their first thermonuclear bomb. Whilst Hoover realises that he is now 'carry[ing] some solemn scrap of history', and the crowd worry for their families' safety, Russ Hodges thinks of 'how his family used to gather around the gramophone', and longs to 'go home and watch his daughter ride her bike down a leafy street'.¹⁹¹

In these expressions of Americans' retreat into an idealized past, we may here witness the important reciprocity between nostalgia and trauma. Wendy Pomery notes that regression often does manifest in response to individual trauma, in as much as 'the wish to avoid the frightful experience of fragmentation leaves one desperate for escape', and one avenue might be to 'return to a fanciful, safer time' rooted in thoughts of childhood.¹⁹² In a wider sense, Jameson and Huyssen observe that nostalgia provides an escape from history as much as access to it; repackaging the past as a series of 'nostalgia trips' forever (faultily) remembered from the present, we may be condemned to an endless present by which our political responsibilities toward past and future generations are weakened.¹⁹³ Consonantly, much of the 'childish' adults seen in this chapter bear signs of both trauma and nostalgia: Slothrop's response to the immediate trauma of warfare consist of a return to his childhood abandonment, and a psychological collapse into a patchwork world of comic-book heroes and villains. Likewise, Violet and Joe's memories of a traumatic childhood in *Jazz* are accompanied by Violet's sudden obsession with babies and dolls, and Joe's nightly trips to find 'children's toys' in 'the bits of night trash the stoop dwellers have left'.¹⁹⁴ In both cases, this nostalgia is viewed as an unhealthy response to repressed trauma, both for themselves and others—Slothrop's child love, as in so many of Pynchon's characters, ultimately develops into a paedophilic desire for Shirley Temple lookalikes, whilst Violet's miscarriages ultimately lead her to steal a real baby from an unguarded

¹⁸⁹ Don DeLillo, *Underworld* (London: Picador, 2015), pp.182, 99.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.418.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁹² Wendy Pomery, 'Trauma, Regression, and Recovery', *Transactional Analysis Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (1998), pp.331-340 (p.331).

¹⁹³ Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, p.88; Jameson, *Postmodernism*, pp.21-5.

¹⁹⁴ Morrison, *Jazz*, pp.222, 107-8; see also Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, pp.798-820.

pushchair. The fates of such characters tessellate with the larger cultural analysis of David Foster Wallace, who suggests that Americans' retreat into cultural images of childhood are both cause and result of the 'great stasis and despair' defining fin-de-siècle America, as if a collective coping mechanism for an increasingly accelerated and fragmented postmodern culture.¹⁹⁵ Characters' response to the alienating conditions of late capitalism are, more often than not, to regress into infancy and submit to the consumerist impulse of American life, literalized in the deadly pleasure of the film cartridge *Infinite Jest*.

Centrally, these depictions return to the difficulty of 'growing up', particularly when confronted by the gruesome realities of adult life. Given that Wallace's vision of adulthood is, at best, the dull heroism of an office job, it is little wonder that characters find it so difficult to grow out of the simpler pleasures of childhood; likewise, Pynchon's corrupted vision of the 'adult' seldom leaves room for any character to surrender their more 'childish' instincts. In one sense, such privileging of the 'childish' over the 'adult' seems a particularly clear example of Huyssen's theory of a 'shift within the temporal organization of the utopian imagination from its futuristic pole toward the pole of remembrance'.¹⁹⁶ Essentially, cultural malaise in the present (and a lack of hope for the future) inspires a cultural desire to return to an idealized vision of the past, even if such images—as Booker's definition of 'postmodern nostalgia' should warn us—remain in the world of the televisual, or never really happened at all. Alongside, we should also simply acknowledge that these works reflect an increasingly youth-centred society, which, though most certainly commodified in the later twentieth century and drained of much of its subversive potential, remains central to American life. The erosion of the 'adult' over the last fifty years has inspired much commentary, from the pessimistic perspectives of critics like Susan Neiman (whose *Why Grow Up?* [2014] restates arguments Lasch made forty years previous), to the more ranging philosophical perspective of Robert Pogue Harrison's *Juvenescence* (2014). All acknowledge the central thesis that American culture is getting younger, however, and that nostalgia plays an important part in American life. From this vantage point of the 2020s, it seems hard to disagree, and a glut of cultural commentators in the 21st century have similarly

¹⁹⁵ Wallace, 'E Unibus Pluram', p.49.

¹⁹⁶ Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, p.88.

emphasized the extent to which the decades since 2000 have borne witness to a ‘nostalgia boom’ in American life.¹⁹⁷

Obviously, nostalgia in art and entertainment (even in commodified form) is not a new development, and such critics admit that the ‘nostalgia cycle’ has been a feature of American culture since long before ‘postmodernity’ could realistically be said to have begun. However, the last fifty years seems to have seen these ‘nostalgia cycles’ getting shorter; in terms of postmodernity, we might say that American history at the end of the century thereby seems less to have ‘ended’, or even become the steady ‘recycling of history’ that Baudrillard theorized contemporaneous to Fukuyama, but begun to circle itself in ever shorter cycles like a temporal logarithmic spiral.¹⁹⁸ Pynchon’s ‘instant nostalgia’ has, in many ways, become the clearest organizing factor in American cultural and political life; we do not have to look too far to see the hegemony of superhero and comic-book films, the density of past reference in shows like *Stranger Things*, the perpetual rebooting and repackaging of older material, and the continuing ‘adulthood’ of forms inherited from child culture (from *Pokémon Go* to *Rick and Morty*). Whilst such examples may seem continued examples of the retreat from political life Wallace and Pynchon associate with late capitalism, nostalgia clearly bears political implications as well. Critics like Leggat and Engles have theorized the rise of nostalgia in the 21st century as a response to various anxieties about the declining hegemony of white masculinity in American life, and the declining hegemony of America as a global superpower more broadly; in this sense, Trump’s promise to ‘Make America Great Again’ invites a wistful immersion in nationalist histories of American greatness, albeit ones which are, typically, mediated through simulacral images. Leggat links this new American nationalism to the fervour inspired by the War on Terror, reinforcing the connection between nostalgia, trauma, and regression—it is this cultural mood that Pynchon remembers in *Bleeding Edge*, where one character opines that ‘11 September infantilized this

¹⁹⁷ See Reynolds, *Retromania*; Matthew Leggat, *Cultural and Political Nostalgia in the Age of Terror: the Melancholic Sublime* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018); David Berliner, *Losing Culture: Nostalgia, Heritage, and Our Accelerated Times* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020); Tim Engles, *White Male Nostalgia in Contemporary North American Literature* (London and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018); Nicola Sayers, *The Promise of Nostalgia: Reminiscence, Longing and Hope in Contemporary American Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

¹⁹⁸ See also Fukuyama, ‘The End of History’; Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, trans. Chris Turner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); and Christopher Hughes, *Liberal Democracy as the End of History: Fukuyama and Postmodern Challenges* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

country', after which it 'chose to default back to childhood' in its pursuit of comic-book heroes and villains on the world stage.¹⁹⁹

Just as images of childhood are particularly expedient, then, so too can images of the past be reconstructed and redeployed to give coherence to national and cultural identities. Nostalgia here functions as a way to appeal to an idealized American past by selectively remembering, and selectively forgetting—after all, nostalgia is 'essentially history without the guilt', as Michael Kammen notes.²⁰⁰ The historiographic metafiction of Louise Erdrich and Toni Morrison attempts to undo this selective amnesia, centring 'minority histories [that] have never come into full cultural consciousness', and providing a riposte to a 'relentlessly optimistic and teleological' mainstream American history.²⁰¹ The presentation of chattel slavery and racist violence in *Beloved* and *Jazz*, or the seizure of Native American land and imposition of Christian values in *Tracks*, here forms an attempt to historicize the various traumas that often leave characters unable to move on from the past. Yet we should acknowledge that their presentation of the intersections of individual and cultural trauma is not to replace biased 'official histories' with more 'accurate' counter-histories, but to interrogate the very methods by which 'official histories' come to be so, and to cast scepticism upon the ways in which such histories shape national and cultural identity. As Nancy J. Peterson identifies, historiographic metafiction works not just to undermine the authority of conventional histories, but to 'forge a new historicity' entirely; like Erdrich's Nanapush, who lives on a clockless 'Indian time' and provides his name as 'No Name' on a Church census, such resistance to conventional theories of history may provide ways to avoid social interpellation and cultural homogenization.²⁰² From this perspective, the 'fragmentation' of Erdrich's families can actually help reorient communal responsibility away from individual households, historical 'grand narrative' toward local and microhistories, and novelistic writing toward oral tradition. Even Morrison's 'circles of sorrow' might be re-encountered in Erdrich as a 'sacred hoop' of constant return, in which the very linear temporal model that gives 'child' or 'adult' coherence is upset; certainly, such is how we see the repeating

¹⁹⁹ See Leggatt, *Political and Cultural Nostalgia*; and Engles, *White Male Nostalgia*; Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*, p.339.

²⁰⁰ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1993), p.688.

²⁰¹ Peterson, *Against Amnesia*, pp.1-2.

²⁰² Erdrich, *Love Medicine*, p.70-1; *Tracks*, p.32. Nancy J. Peterson, 'History, Postmodernism, and Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*', *PMLA*, Vol. 109, No. 5 (October 1994), pp.982-994 (p.984).

patterns of Pauline and Marie's childhood, or the narrative discontinuity that seldom deals with characters' childhoods in isolation.²⁰³

Again, such interrogations of the gaps between past and present can be restated as an interrogation of the gaps between 'child' and 'adult'. These authors' depictions of traumatized adults obviously do not signal cultural regression in the same way as Wallace or Pynchon—which would merely recapitulate the racist logic of Western colonialism that so often figured itself as a paternal guide toward cultural 'progress'—but interrogates the teleology that underlies theories of psychosocial development toward a stable 'adult' state.²⁰⁴ As Kathryn Bond Stockton has noted, 'growing up' may be seen as a 'short-sighted, limited rendering of human growth' inasmuch as it implies an 'end to growth when full stature (or reproduction) is achieved'; likewise, we might note the cultural contingency of the 'adult', which intimates a stable relationship with the culture as a representative, fully-formed citizen.²⁰⁵ In fact, the 'adult' values seen in this chapter naturally lean toward conservatism in their emphasis upon adulthood as static and final, and, as cultural commentators' entreaties to 'grow up' should warn us, the idea of the 'adult' hides within it a medley of expectations toward how people should act, what they should believe, and what cultural forms or pastimes are fit for them. This is seen to be not only culturally mediated but fundamentally gendered, heteronormative, and ableist, since this 'adult' life still places heavy emphasis upon the same visions of employment, marriage, and 'family values' that inspired the political landscape of the '80s and '90s; the 'adult' is, in most of these commentators' view, defined primarily by their ability to buy a home and raise a family. As much as postmodernist literature testifies to cultural nostalgia and cultural trauma, then, its depiction of 'regressive' adults also simply acts to try to disengage these cultural connotations from actual adults (in the sense of age) and show their aggressive normativity. Accompanied by a suitable incredulity toward historical metanarratives, the stable connotations of 'growing up' or

²⁰³ See Reid, 'The Stories We Tell', pp.81-2. Elizabeth Gargano has also written about Erdrich's use of Native American story structure and oral traditions, specifically in her works for children. See Elizabeth Gargano, 'Oral Narrative and Ojibwa Story Cycles in Louise Erdrich's *Birchbark House* and *Game of Silence*', in Michelle Pagni Stewart and Yvonne Atkinson (eds.), *Ethnic Literary Traditions in American Children's Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

²⁰⁴ See Alastair Pennycook, *English and the Discourses of Colonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp.60-61.

²⁰⁵ Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, Or, Growing Up Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p.11.

'becoming adult' are revealed to be another myth of teleological progress bound to cultural and national mythologies.

Conclusion: The Postmodernist Child

Consonant with literary studies of ‘the Romantic Child’ or ‘the Puritan Child’, one might expect this study to end with a taxonomized account of ‘the Postmodernist Child’. As previous chapters have made clear, however, the shaky connotations of the term ‘postmodernism’ make this a difficult task, and to unite all of these various threads now would undo much of the essential groundwork on its different usages, and the contextualization of these usages. My reluctance to abstract is particularly pronounced given the accelerated changes that have affected American society, and more specifically American childhood, over the last hundred years or so. As I laid out in my introduction, this period can be broadly characterized by an increasingly ‘child-centric’ American society—with the increasing institutionalization of young people, visibility of young people in art and media, obsession with children in political discourse, and commercialization of child culture—but it should be clear to even the most casual observer that the 1950s and ‘60s child culture to which Pynchon and Coover refer is very different to the culture of the ‘80s and ‘90s explored by Don DeLillo and David Foster Wallace. True, this may only be by a matter of degree, and Steven Mintz’s concept of a ‘postmodern childhood’ does much to help characterize the increasingly mediatized and commercialized worlds of childhood which, though rooted in the 1950s, fully blossomed in the 1980s.¹ Even so, we have seen that the children depicted in these novels often respond to more immediate contexts of childhood, or indeed often lag behind historical shifts in child culture, in such a way that collapsing them together elides important points of divergence.

At least at the start, then, it is necessary to compartmentalize these different threads of postmodernism, which I have characterized by reference to the shifting usage of the term. In works of early postmodernism, during which time the term first became popularized by critics like Fiedler and Hassan, depictions of children (bracketed under ‘the Animate Child’) are defined by animacy, creativity and rebelliousness. Artefacts of child culture are used to provide an irreverent challenge to the expectations of ‘serious fiction’, and younger characters provide an oppositional figure to a variety of stifling ‘adult’ norms, traditions, and canons of taste. Fiedler is therefore right to link this phase of postmodernism to the wider countercultural upheaval and youth ferment of the Long Sixties, and Joanna Freer’s emphasis on Pynchon’s debts to the Yippies could be extended to much early postmodernism in general, which recalls Jerry Rubin’s

¹ Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004), p.4.

nostalgia for a childhood in which ‘you can be whatever you want to be’.² Here, the tendency to feature young adult characters obsessed with children represents a desire to ally themselves with the inarticulate joy of childhood rather than an ‘adult’ world of compromise and responsibility, and the child often forms an invitation toward creativity and autotelic ‘play’. The *Animate Child* therein draws upon a Romantic fascination with childhood, albeit infused with a tendency toward independence and unruliness hewn from a more American tradition, particularly the ‘Bad Boy’ novels of Twain and Peck; again, the world of the child forms an ironic contrast to the more ‘serious’ world of the adult, which is represented primarily in terms of dullness and hypocrisy, and suggested to rest upon patterns of exploitation unknown to the humble morality of the child. Formally, this phase of postmodernism draws from an avant-garde tradition of stylistic heterogeneity and formal disruption akin to Dada and early Surrealism, and it is telling that children appear in artefacts in of both as icons of the ‘marvellous’ and irrational.³ The presence of children in postmodernism represents a continuation of this invitation to ‘let id prevail over ego’, as Fiedler has it, and the recurrence of nonsense literature, comic books and fairy tales shows a desire to place the literary ambitions of modernism upon a more joyful, fantastical backdrop.⁴

This is not to say that postmodernist depictions of children and child culture in the ‘60s are wholly happy. In works like Coover’s *The Cat in the Hat for President*, childish innocence is offset by adult experience as much as vice versa, and Kurt Vonnegut and Joseph Heller oftentimes include children and child culture as a darkly comic counterpoint to a fallen adult world. This leads us into a tendency in the ‘70s and ‘80s to depict children in proximity to suffering or exclusion, for which I have centred *Gravity’s Rainbow* and its focus on ‘the Preterite’. For one, this term works to indicate victimhood, and these texts are replete with depictions of child abuse in scenes far more sadistic (and yet far less sentimentalized) than would tend to be found before the mid-century. More broadly, Pynchon’s use of the term to connote alterity proves fertile ground for understanding authors like Kathy Acker, Bertha Harris, Rikki Ducornet, Toni Cade Bambara and Toni Morrison. In their works a focus on rebellious

² Jerry Rubin, *Do It: Scenarios of the Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), p.55; see also Leslie Fiedler, ‘The New Mutants’, *Partisan Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Fall 1965), pp.505-525.

³ See, for instance, André Breton’s insistence that ‘children are weaned on the marvelous’ but quickly lose it as they grow; he thus calls for ‘fairy tales to be written for adults, fairy tales still almost blue’. André Breton, ‘Manifesto of Surrealism’, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), pp.1-49 (p.5).

⁴ Leslie Fiedler, ‘The New Mutants’, *Partisan Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Fall 1965), pp.505-525 (p.510).

independence persists, but these authors show a far keener understanding of the contingencies upon which childhood joy is predicated—after all, most depictions of the Animate Child focus on young white boys with a certain degree of material comfort. The literary child of Acker, Ducornet and Harris tries to make this space for young girls as well, whilst acknowledging the gendered expectations exerted upon girls from an early age, oftentimes by collapsing discursive violence into physical acts of molestation or child abuse. Toni Morrison and Toni Cade Bambara, meanwhile, acknowledge the extent to which America's idealized vision of childhood is normatively white, and try to show the struggles of young black girls to exert themselves in a racist American society. Such works betray the political implications of postmodernism in the '70s and '80s, and the focus on children and children's education proves useful for studying the perpetuation of ideology through language (and its canonization as knowledge), and the formation of identity from without (by repressive forces like schools, churches, and parents). By the 1980s especially, such works show the influence of moral panics about childhood and the Reaganite obsession with fraying 'family values', whilst providing a shrewd glimpse into the various racist, sexist and homophobic biases that underlie these appeals to the welfare of children.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, works of postmodernism show more attention to the changing circumstances of a 'postmodern childhood'. Consonant with the explosive growth of a mediatized children's culture, works by Don DeLillo, David Foster Wallace and Thomas Pynchon depict the role of television in young people's lives, often placing heavy emphasis upon its debilitating aspects. These authors' resistance to a child culture based around solitary television watching and video gaming shows surprising links to conservative anxieties about television, which extended to Neil Postman's famous suggestion that the boundaries between childhood and adulthood were being erased.⁵ Like the children of Heller, Acker and Morrison, there is a continuing sense that these children are being co-opted or exploited by a world of 'adult' interests, but the overlaps between 'adult' and 'child' have become such that it no longer seems realistic to try to separate children from the world of consumer capitalism, and indeed such that children often seem the most adept at navigating the world of the 'hyperreal'. At its height this is seen in the figure of the child prodigy, a child of premature 'adult' intelligence, and the links seen here between the absorption of prodigious information and emotional instability

⁵ See Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1982); and Marie Winn, *Children without Childhood* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

or maldevelopment prove a worrying microcosm of the effects of late capitalism more broadly.⁶ Again, a focus on childhood education proves fertile ground for problematizing how children are taught—particularly their immersion in a Western canon of ‘great white men’—and for emphasising the contingencies underlying prodigious knowledge. By works of late postmodernism, it is clear that this challenge to canonized art and philosophy extends even to earlier iterations of postmodernism, and much of these works attempt to distinguish themselves from the work of early postmodernists even as they recapitulate their challenge to a domesticated avant-garde.

Whilst these varied groupings of the postmodernist child bear obvious differences, we could highlight a few key themes running throughout. For one, depictions of children in postmodernism are for the most part sympathetic, and tend to side with the child over a world of repressive and alienating adulthood. Though some depictions of the Prodigious Child recall the original meaning of the monstrous ‘prodigy’, the world of these children still usually seems preferable to that of adults; even David Foster Wallace’s repudiation of childish pleasure for adult responsibility comes with the acknowledgement that the latter is, at least in the short term, tortuously boring and ascetic. In all phases of postmodernism, then, children are most content discovered alone or with other children, and their interactions with adults are almost entirely negative. It should come as no surprise that dysfunctional families and repressive schools abound in most postmodernist literature, and though these trends map on to the increasing divorce rate and decreasing marriage rate after the mid-Sixties, they again emphasize the extent to which children and adults cannot healthily co-exist; instead, we see a focus on children’s independence and autonomy, and most attempts by adults to curb or direct these energies are shown as repressive or exploitative. Postmodernist literature therein betrays its broadly left-leaning politics, in its resistance to both conservative appeals to rigid ‘tradition’ and the tough policing of personal liberties, and one could even measure the politics of postmodernism by reference to its stance on permissive parenting. It might strike us, for instance, that we see very little reference to contemporaneous anxieties about juvenile delinquency in postmodernist

⁶ Though, as has been repeatedly emphasized, their assumption of a correlation between prodigious knowledge and emotional maldevelopment or even neurodivergence goes against most empirical research in the area. See, for instance, Maureen Neihart et al. (eds.), *The Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Children: What Do We Know?* (Washington, DC: Prufrock Press, 2002); and Stuart Murray, *Representing Autism: Culture, Narrative, Fascination* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).

literature, which instead is represented as an exaggerated fear of unsupervised play or childish rambunctiousness.

Stylistically, this fondness for the childish also informs postmodernist literature's use of child culture, particularly in ironic or comic contrast with more 'adult' artefacts like political speeches; scenes of sex or violence; complex mathematical, linguistic or philosophical theory; and canonical literature. Just as children tend to appear in these novels as a disruptive or subversive contrast to an orthodoxy of learned 'adult' values, the use of child culture provides a disruptive intrusion of the 'childish' into the world of the 'adult', undercutting the seriousness and authority of the latter whilst venerating the imaginative potential of the former. In its most riotous iterations (the work of Pynchon, Reed, and Acker for instance, with some continuities in Wallace, DeWitt and Everett), the childish becomes akin to Bakhtin's famous notion of the 'carnavalesque': the childish colouring of the adult world enacts a fantastical 'liberation from the prevailing truth and established order' by showing 'symbols of power and violence turned inside out'.⁷ The childish can here understood in proximity to forms associated with both postmodernism and carnival humour (such as Menippean satire and the picaresque) but also in proximity to other forms which betray their embrace of the 'marvellous' and fantastical.⁸ It is surprising that Fiedler and McHale's emphasis upon the postmodernist debt to fantasy and science fiction, for instance, does not extend to children's literature, which seems to show a similar 'ontological' focus on constructing new worlds; just as one might say that science fiction is postmodernism's 'non-canonized or low art [...] sister-genre', much postmodernism could be humorously understood as children's literature for adults.⁹ In one sense, the use of inherently unrealistic childish forms for an adult readership flaunts the text's own constructedness—in its clearest iteration, the use of 'Once Upon a Time'—and thereby forms a natural complement to the metatextual dynamics of much postmodernism.¹⁰ However, this need not manifest in a simple invitation toward fantasy or escapism; childish forms like the Dick and Jane story at the beginning of *The Bluest Eye*, the performance of Cinderella in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, or the map of

⁷ See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Helene Iwolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp.10, 91.

⁸ See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky and his Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp.113-17; as well as Theodore D. Kharpertian, *A Hand to Turn the Time: The Menippean Satires of Thomas Pynchon* (Rutherford and Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990); and Kathryn Hume, 'Diffused Satire in Contemporary American Fiction', *Modern Philology*, Vol. 105, No.2 (November 2007), pp.300-325.

⁹ See Fiedler, 'The New Mutants', pp.507-8; Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (Taylor and Francis, 1987), p.59.

¹⁰ See, for instance, John Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), pp.1-2.

Janey's dreams in *Blood and Guts in High School* all draw contrast to the harsher realities present in the text, and often denote a desire to retreat from these realities into a safer world of childish fantasy and fun.

Importantly, the clash of the 'childish' and the 'adult' undermines the conceptual clarity of each, and if postmodernism can be understood as an attempt to 'deconstruct binary oppositions [...] at the foundation of Western metaphysics', we can most certainly add 'adult' and 'child' to a list of apparent opposites it shows substantial slippage between.¹¹ For one, the celebration of the rational maturity of the adult is strongly refuted, and children often provide an instructive example to adults upon what a more happy or equitable society would look like. By the time we move into the '80s and '90s, children are also seen to have access to the same areas of information and society that adults do, and often seem most adept at navigating new technological forms and cultural trends. In some ways, late postmodernism therein represents a realisation of the childish ambitions of early postmodernism—compare, for instance, the righteous children's town of *Yellow Back Radio Broke Down* to Murray's insistence in *White Noise* that America had become 'a society of kids'.¹² Yet there is a clear lament in later postmodernism for the child's lack of insulation from the 'adult' forces of consumer gratification, technological advancement, and individual atomization. The assumption of children's independence from the world of the adult is constantly undercut; children's culture is seen as an increasingly adult-led industry that indoctrinates young minds and exploits them for profit, and children in the family are depicted at the whim of the same economic disparities and racist violence that threatens their parents. Even the image of the 'child' is often seen to be a fiction primarily created and deployed by adults, and the ironic dimensions of postmodernism prove central to underlining the constructedness of the ideal or universal 'child'. Seen in depictions of children in advertisements and propaganda, and the figure of the child actor (especially the ubiquitous synecdoche of Shirley Temple), these novelists attest to the cultural currency and political expediency of the hypothetical 'child'. Appeals to this fictional child are seen as a discursive manoeuvre used by adults to sanitize their own image and aspirations, and often have little to do with, or may actively harm, real children in the process.

¹¹ W. Lawrence Hogue, *Postmodern American Literature and its Other* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009), p.143.

¹² Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (New York: Picador, 2011), pp.59-60; see also Ishmael Reed, *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (London: Allison & Busby, 1995), pp.16-17.

Postmodernist literature thus walks a tight balance. These novels are full of children, and yet deeply suspicious of the ways in which children are deployed in art and media, especially when predominantly created and curated by adults. For this reason, sentimentalized depictions of children are usually held at an ironic distance; clearly, saccharine images like Baby Igor with ‘bare legs pressed awkwardly together’, ‘shoulder-length curls’, and ‘rosy cheeks’ are no longer credible in the world of postmodernity.¹³ As in the climax of the film *Cashiered*, which depicts the tragic death of the child set to a swell of ‘strange thirties movie music with the massive sax section’, this extends to scenes of child suffering, which are also acknowledged as trite invitations to adult pity. Nevertheless, this should not be mistaken as an attempt to ironize or mock the suffering and oppression of children, which is a point of moral clarity in a postmodernist canon often mischaracterized as apolitical, unethical, or waylaid by a self-defeating moral relativism. Child suffering is still ubiquitous in postmodernism, but *sans* much of the pathos invited by the Victorian child; again, such fictions are seen to obscure the real facts of child suffering, which seldom appears amid such emotionally heightened scenery. As novels like *Catch-22*, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, *Sula*, *Blood and Guts in High School* or *Operation Wandering Soul* should attest to, the suffering of children is a quotidian fact of life in the twentieth century, particularly for children in wartime, children in poverty or ill health, and children who come face to face with the racist and sexist violence meted out by adults. Whilst some of these novels may thereby seem nihilistic or resigned at times, their oftentimes surreal, disorientating, or flatly affectless presentation of child suffering also work hard to avoid ‘lead[ing] readers into the comfort of pitying [the child] rather than into an interrogation of themselves’, as Toni Morrison would eventually remark of her first novel.¹⁴ Their presentation of children is seldom overtly didactic, which would seem inimical to the workings of postmodernism, but the reluctance to submit the child to a clear moral and emotional colouring hints less toward moral ambivalence than a desire to defamiliarize images of human suffering that have long become ‘exhausted’ fictions.

We might thereby locate postmodernist literature historically amid a time of crisis for children and childhood in the later twentieth century. The instability of the category of ‘child’ (particularly in relation to ‘adult’) tessellates with repeated proclamations about the ‘disappearance of childhood’ in a world where they are repeatedly exposed to and co-opted by

¹³ Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (London: Vintage, 2000), p.17.

¹⁴ Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (London: Vintage, 1999), p.x.

adult forces. As early as 1967, Joan Didion's article about the Haight-Ashbury commune—where Jerry Rubin boasted of playing make-believe with children—climaxes with a depiction of a five-year-old on LSD, and warns of a generation of children and adolescents set adrift from the responsibilities of a civilized society:

At some point between 1945 and 1967, we had somehow neglected to tell these children the rules of the game we happened to be playing. Maybe we had stopped believing in the rules ourselves, maybe we were having a failure of nerve about the game. Or maybe there were just too few people around to do the telling. These were children who grew up cut loose from the web of cousins and great-aunts and family doctors and lifelong neighbors who had traditionally suggested and enforced the society's values. [...] They are less in rebellion against the society than ignorant of it, able only to feed back certain of its most publicized self-doubts, *Vietnam, diet pills, the Bomb*.¹⁵

Didion's piece proves an early example of an increasing antipathy toward the counterculture that came to define political discourse in the '70s and '80s, where conservatives in particular averred that the heady excesses of the era had frayed 'family values', and widened societal schisms. Children were subsequently centred in debates about a failing America, defined by a sharp rise in divorces, fall in marriages, and repeated images of young people falling prey to poverty, drugs, violence, and sex. As such images should remind us, much of these changes reflected demographic and cultural shifts in the 1970s, as well as a series of economic crises in the 1970s that were exacerbated by a reversal of several decades of New Deal consensus and welfare provision; indeed, one feels that the purpose of centring 'child abuse' is to obscure larger social, cultural and economic forces, and shift blame to a variety of individual bogeymen (single mothers, child abductors, drug dealers, paedophiles, video games, television, rap music). Postmodernist literature certainly reflects many of these historical trends in its presentation of children; as well as divorce and familial dysfunction, depictions of paedophilia are commonplace, and the intrusion of video games and television into the family home is oftentimes viewed as a danger to children's emotional wellbeing and social development.

Whilst postmodernists might provide a challenge to the conservative orthodoxy of 'family values', then, they most certainly do not dismiss concerns about the safety of children offhand. Especially after the early phase of postmodernist literature, children are seen as

¹⁵ Joan Didion, 'Slouching Towards Bethlehem', in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem: Essays* (London: 4th Estate, 2017), pp.84-129 (p.122).

increasingly unhappy and unsafe, and appeals to an idealized phase of early life are offset by the centring of children who seldom enjoy such a carefree existence. The ‘happy child’ is increasingly seen as a fiction usable only by advertisers and mawkish TV sitcoms, and children are seen to be waylaid with psychological burdens which last long into adulthood; in the fiction of authors as disparate as Kurt Vonnegut, Toni Morrison, Kathy Acker, David Foster Wallace, and Louise Erdrich, almost every presentation of childhood is coloured by formative trauma or abuse. Aside from well-publicized public outcries and scandals about the safety of children, such depictions tessellate with an empirical ‘skyrocket[ing]’ of depression and suicide amongst children and young people, especially in the ‘80s and beyond.¹⁶ Even if many empirical studies hesitate to share the platitude that this millennial sadness is rooted in the use of electronic devices, postmodernist authors like David Foster Wallace firmly disagree, and place children at the forefront of a generation corrupted and atomized by television. Novels like DeLillo’s *White Noise* and *Libra*, which nod to the influence of childhood television watching on violent behaviour, may similarly seem prescient amid the empirical rise of school shootings committed by children and adolescents in the later twentieth century.¹⁷ Admittedly, the biggest rises in such statistics occur in young people above the age of about fourteen, and so such presentations could be understood in proximity to concerns about adolescence and the pains of puberty, which this thesis has largely tried to avoid. Even so, the presentation of children of eleven or younger in proximity to these concerns about adolescent development can be seen to reflect a concern that the pressures of ‘growing up’ are affecting people at an earlier and earlier age. The prominence of such children ‘growing up too fast, too soon’, in the words of David Elkin, suggests that one of the primary characteristics of a ‘postmodern’ childhood is indeed the porous boundaries between childhood and adulthood (as Steven Mintz has described), and the waning sense that childhood can or should be seen as a protected space from ‘adult’ concerns.¹⁸

These concerns about children certainly seem prescient from the standpoint of the 2010s and 2020s. Focus on children’s relationship with electronic technologies has intensified in ‘the digital age’, characterized by a predominantly ‘online’ life and a proliferation of gaming

¹⁶ Maureen Niehart, ‘Gifted Children and Depression’, in Niehart et al. (eds.), *The Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Children: What Do We Know?* (Washington, DC: Prufrock Press, 2002), pp.93-103 (p.93).

¹⁷ Nils Böckler et al, ‘School Shootings: Conceptual Framework and International Empirical Trends’, in Nils Böckler et al (eds.), *School Shootings: International Research, Case Studies, and Concepts for Prevention* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), pp.1-25 (p.9).

¹⁸ See David Elkind, *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon* (New York: Hachette Books, 1988); and Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, pp.4-5.

technologies aimed at children which have often been portrayed as a threat to emotional and physical health.¹⁹ As noted in my third chapter, most empirical studies have nuanced moral panics about television, video games and the internet, but the image of a child full of information but lacking in social or emotional maturity—in its clearest iteration, the child prodigies of late postmodernism—has become a common trope in art and entertainment of the new millennium. In terms of American fiction, Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2004) recapitulates the 'evil child' in terms of a disturbed school shooter; Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) depicts a nine-year-old prodigy with Asperger's syndrome dealing with his father's death; and Junot Díaz's *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) centres on a 'geeky' young social outcast whose story is shot through with references to popular science fiction and fantasy. Remembered accounts of a precocious child's tumultuous growth within dysfunctional families or hostile settings can be found in works of autofiction like Dave Egger's *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000) Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* series (2000-2004), and Alison Bechdel's graphic novels *Fun Home* (2006) and *Are You My Mother?* (2012), all of which blend fiction and autobiography in their treatment of the past. The centring of children, and particularly the relationship between children and parents in all of the above—which could be considered works of 'post-postmodernism'—gives credence to Mary Holland's suggestion that subsequent developments after postmodernism can be defined by a sharper focus upon the family, presenting 'the family as a context for constructing and understanding the self'.²⁰ Meanwhile, the focus upon children's oftentimes worrying relationship with electronic media oftentimes provides a microcosm for broader socioemotional effects of a digitized consumer society, and seem therefore to tessellate with Alan Kirby's suggestion that late postmodernism and subsequent developments should be understood primarily as a reaction to the influence of new technologies upon everyday life.²¹ In any case, most important to this thesis is to note a continued liminality between 'child' and 'adult' in fiction after the new millennium; whilst children are still shown to be invited into an 'adult' world of prodigious (and potentially dangerous) information, we could note the focus on their relationship with adults within the family, and recollections of youth which bridge the concerns of adult focalizers and their childhood selves.

¹⁹ See John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, *Born Digital: How Children Grow Up in a Digital Age* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

²⁰ Mary K. Holland, *Succeeding Postmodernism: Language and Humanism in Contemporary American Literature* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.9.

²¹ Alan Kirby, *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture* (New York & London: Continuum, 2009).

Even so, as I have suggested in my fourth chapter, the blurring of ‘adult’ and ‘child’ weakens both terms, and postmodernist texts might well be seen to reflect a ‘crisis of adulthood’ as much as a ‘crisis of childhood’ in recent history. From the earliest iterations of postmodernism, children are revered precisely for the fact that they are not ‘adults’, who are taken to represent a variety of stifling norms and prejudices. In novels by Pynchon, Reed, Vonnegut, Barth, Sukenick, and Katz, protagonists in their twenties or thirties repeatedly align themselves with children rather than submit to the responsibilities they associate with their parents’ generation—as Lasch has it, ‘the homely comforts of love, work, and family life’—and betray much nostalgia for a carefree childhood of constant play and adventure.²² At the other end of the postmodernist canon, the predominant note in David Foster Wallace’s novels is still an anxiety about growing up and a reluctance to ‘put away childish things’; the major difference, as Pynchon and Wallace so deftly point out, is simply that the ‘cult of youth’ that sustained the Animate Child has long since been co-opted by television and advertising, and drained of its subversive potential.²³ In Pynchon’s work, the commodified image of childhood is seen to merely provide adults with a masturbatory immersion in an idealized past, whilst *Infinite Jest* sets a nostalgic regression to childhood amid a whole culture built upon addictive pleasure, in which viewers will eschew all responsibilities toward themselves and others for a fix of ‘Too Much Fun’.²⁴ Such anxieties prove prescient for concerns about not only children’s but adults’ health in the 21st century; studies have attempted to characterize nascent addictions like gaming addiction, social media addiction, and Internet pornography addiction, and have emphasized that the rate of depression and suicide has climbed since the end of the century for adults as well as children.²⁵ As much as children are often presented as unhappy and maladjusted in these novels, it should be acknowledged that older characters are seldom much happier, and that their idealization of children usually seems to cast an envious glance away from the circumstances of their own life.

The ‘Adult-Child’ of much postmodernist literature therein tessellates with a cultural obsession since the 1960s about adults’ ‘growing down’. Such accounts have significant

²² Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (W.W. Norton & Co, 1991), p.242.

²³ David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King: An Unfinished Novel* (London: Penguin, 2012), pp.174-5.

²⁴ David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest* (London: Abacus, 2014), p.492.

²⁵ See Holly Hedegaard, Sally C. Curtin, and Margaret Warner, ‘Suicide Mortality in the United States, 1999-2017’, *NCHS Data Brief*, No. 330 (November 2018), pp.1-8; Mark N. Potenza, Kyle Faust and David Faust (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Technologies and Mental Health* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); and Bahadır Bozoglan (ed.), *Psychological, Social and Cultural Aspects of Internet Addiction* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2017).

precedents—the ‘childish adults’ of Victorian fiction, theories about ‘prolonged adolescence’ in the 1920s, and a whole canon of American novels often defined (as Fiedler provocatively suggested) by anxieties about growing up—but this becomes so ingrained in the later twentieth century that one might even define ‘postmodernity’ by reference to a waning sense of what an ‘adult’ is or should be. From Lasch’s account of American cultural malaise to Neil Postman’s repudiation of ‘grown men’ who read comic books, critics have repeatedly located a failure to ‘grow up’ as a source of contemporary cultural crisis. As I have noted, this may in truth be better understood by reference to changing cultural tastes and economic circumstances, rather than any collective cultural ‘Peter Pan syndrome’; just as it is clear that forms temporarily associated with children found an older and older audience (oftentimes as a natural result of this audience steadily growing in age), economic developments that have seen an increase in college attendees have been accompanied with an economic stagnation that has left young people unable to put together the capital to raise a family and buy a home. This has led to the more clear-headed concept of ‘emerging adulthood’ in the twenty-first century, as well as attempts to reconceptualise class dynamics in the era of the gig economy, both of which acknowledge that young people are experiencing their twenties and thirties differently to their parents, and very differently to their grandparents.²⁶ Unlike these previous generations, most young Americans will leave home at 18 or 19 but ‘most do not marry, become parents, or find a long term job until their late twenties’, making the inbetween stage between ‘child’ and ‘adult’ a time of increased freedom but also great anxiety and instability.²⁷ Research in this area is fairly new—particularly in terms of applying the ‘emerging adulthood’ paradigm to popular art and media—but the ‘Adult-Child’ shows this to be an area rich with research possibilities. The presentation of characters in their twenties and thirties for whom ‘marriage, home, and children are seen [...] as perils to be avoided’ clearly prefigures the concept of the ‘emerging adult’ and bolsters Arnett’s suggestion of a lineage between the idea of the ‘emerging adult’ today and the youth movements of the long Sixties.²⁸

Despite these cultural and economic factors, the sense that cultural decline is rooted in a failure to mature still remains a popular notion to this day, and critics have constantly defined our own era by the preeminence of nostalgia. The work of Pynchon and Wallace, for instance,

²⁶ See Alan Reifman, Malinda J. Colwell and Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, ‘Emerging Adulthood: Theory, Assessment and Application’, *Journal of Youth Development*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Summer 2007), pp.1-12.

²⁷ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.6-7.

foretells not only the ‘emerging adult’ but the influence of a ‘postmodern nostalgia’ for televised images and consumer products; it is thus that critics like Brendan Keogh characterize the popularity of *Pokémon Go* in the late 2010s, and remastered games like the *Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy* (2017) and *Spyro Reignited Trilogy* (2018), given that a large section of its audience was ‘the 20- or 30-something reliving their childhood experience’ of playing in the 1990s.²⁹ As Simon Reynolds has noted, the 2000s and 2010s have been ‘dominated by the “re-” prefix: revivals, reissues, remakes, reenactments’;³⁰ certainly, popular cinema is characterized currently by a glut of reboots or remakes, and much commentary has emphasized the extent to which shows like Netflix’s *Stranger Things* recycle the images and tropes of 1980s science fiction, horror and fantasy.³¹ Like Wallace, many critics portray such trends in terms of cultural decline or arrested development, and from the heady philosophical ends of Robert Pogue Harrison’s *Juvenescence* to the more alarmist *Why Grow Up?* by Susan Neiman, many such critics place this nostalgic urge within a culture defined by a fear of growing old or letting go of fond memories of youth. Yet as my fourth chapter suggests, this nostalgic urge often seems to manifest as a response to trauma, and this recolouring of the past oftentimes seems the result of dissatisfaction in the present. In the same year that *Pokémon Go* and *Stranger Things* were first released, Donald Trump was elected President of the United States, and the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union; given that the campaigns for both relied so heavy on a backwards glance to past glory (in its clearest iteration, ‘Make America Great Again’), critics like Tim Engles have characterized the campaign as an example of a politics of nostalgia.³² Indeed, the very political and cultural moment in which America now finds itself is suggested by Engles to be a response to the declining hegemony of white men in cultural and political life—hence the predominance of ‘white male nostalgia’ in the rhetoric of the Alt-Right. Again, postmodernist literature here seems prescient; the portrayal of the inevitably political act of nostalgic ‘history-making’ (particularly since it is used to give coherence to national identity) looks ahead to the Trump Presidency and its fallout, as well as attempts to challenge conventional histories of America in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020.

²⁹ Brendan Keogh, ‘Pokémon GO, the novelty of nostalgia, and the ubiquity of the smartphone’, *Mobile Media and Communication*, vol. 5, no. 1, (2017), pp.38-41 (p.39).

³⁰ Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture’s Addiction to Its Own Past* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011), p.xi.

³¹ See Kevin J. Wetmore (ed.), *Uncovering Stranger Things: Essays on Eighties Nostalgia* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2018).

³² See Tim Engles, *White Male Nostalgia in Contemporary North American Literature* (London and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018); as well as Matthew Leggat, *Cultural and Political Nostalgia in the Age of Terror: the Melancholic Sublime* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018); and Nicola Sayers, *The Promise of Nostalgia: Reminiscence, Longing and Hope in Contemporary American Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

As well as reminding us of the political implications underlying the making of ‘official’ histories, postmodernist texts similarly show us that the delineation of the ‘adult’ is inevitably loaded. Just as the ‘child’ is better seen as a cultural construct than a biological constant, so too is the ‘adult’, and reflects much of a culture’s normative beliefs about what it is to be a fully realised human being. Here, the view of the ‘adult’ in much postmodernist literature is inevitably skewed toward conservatism; the ‘adult’ in postmodernism is representative primarily of a series of dated beliefs about gender roles, the primacy of heterosexual marriage, the Protestant work ethic, the capitalist economy, and, indeed, the need to protect children from ‘adult’ content. The cultural pastimes of the ‘adult’, meanwhile, reflect overtly elitist, ableist and Eurocentric canons of taste; it is telling, for instance, that those forms relegated to ‘juvenile’ forms were oftentimes cheap and widely accessible, and the canonization of them as ‘children’s culture’ delegitimated the cultural consumption of the working classes as somehow regressive or lesser. The inclusion of Toni Morrison and Louise Erdrich in my final chapter proves an important reminder that the collapse of ‘adult’ and ‘child’ seen in postmodernist literature does not simply aver that ‘children have become adults’ or vice versa, but that each category is revealed to hide a medley of culturally situated and materially contingent biases. The ability to grow into a happy, functioning adult is not just a matter of personal responsibility and cultural choice, but obviously tied to material and socioemotional circumstances, just as ‘child abuse’ reflects wider structural problems than individual agents of harm or oppression. Meanwhile, the very notion of what a ‘functioning adult’ might look like, over and above the simple fact of age, is predominantly representative of the ossified ‘traditions’ and biases of a dominant culture, and it is unsurprising that an increasing suspicion toward these biases has been accompanied by an insecurity about what an ‘adult’ is or might look like.

Postmodernist literature thereby asks: what is ‘growing up’? To where are children ‘growing’, and what might a ‘childish’ adult look like? In one sense, this might simply seem straightforwardly reflective of a culture that has seen the steady conceptual collapse of the ‘adult’ and ‘childish’, terms which may today seem floating signifiers as outmoded as ‘manly’ or ‘feminine’. After all, whilst generational strife is still very much the *lingua franca* of American culture, the distinctions between ‘adult’ and ‘childish’ sensibilities have mitosed into a whole host of predominantly generational distinctions (‘millennials’, ‘Gen Z’, ‘Boomers’); similarly, the simple distinction of ‘adult vs. child’ as ‘conservative vs. progressive’ no longer seems credible in

the age of Trump, who is as often associated with infantilism than callous ‘adult’ values.³³ Perhaps more importantly, however, these novels’ destabilization of the ‘adult’ child’ binary also represents an attempt to undermine the distinction between ‘childhood/children and ‘adulthood/society’, or at least suggest their boundaries to be far more porous than we might believe.³⁴ Children are seen less as ‘becomings’—as if waiting to develop into a fully autonomous subject—than ‘beings’, endowed with their own agency and figured as ‘contributors, claim- and rights-holders’ on their own destiny.³⁵ In parallel, the ‘adult’ is seen as less an end-in-itself than a perpetual state of potential change, ‘a multiplicity of becomings in which all are incomplete or dependent’.³⁶ In a canon with few clear answers, the acknowledgment of this dual state of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ is shown to be essential to the way in which we understand ourselves and others, and may explain why the child is so often centred in this state of flux. Like the children we have seen through this thesis, it is the liminal state between ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ that we can attempt to exert our claim to a privileged autonomy, whilst acknowledging our dependence upon the claims of others; the continuation of this liminality into adulthood avers, meanwhile, that we are never too late to interrogate our beliefs as culturally ‘learned’, and that it is never too late to ‘unlearn’ them.

³³ See Daniel W. Drezner, *The Toddler-in-Chief: What Donald Trump Teaches Us About the Modern Presidency* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2020);

³⁴ See Jens Qvortrup, ‘Are Children Human Beings or Human Becomings’, *Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Sociali*, Vol.117, No.3/4 (December 2009), pp. 631-653 (p.635).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.638.

³⁶ Alan Prout, *The Future of Childhood* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2005), p.67.

Bibliography

- Acker, Kathy, *Blood and Guts in High School* (St Ives: Penguin, 2017).
- Acker, Kathy, *Great Expectations* (St Ives: Penguin, 2018).
- Acker, Kathy, *Portrait of an Eye: Three Novels* (New York: Pantheon, 1992).
- Adorno, Theodore, and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp.99-100. see also
- Agyepong, Tera Eva, *The Criminalization of Black Children: Race, Gender, and Delinquency in Chicago's Juvenile Justice System, 1899-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).
- Alberti, Fay Bound, *This Mortal Coil: The Human Body in History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
- Alexander, Alison, and James Owers, 'The Economics of Children's Television', in J. Alison Bryant (ed.), *The Children's Television Community* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007), pp.57-74.
- Allen, Barry, 'Postmodern Pragmatism: Richard Rorty's Transformation of American Philosophy', *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 36, No.1 (Spring 2008), pp.1-15.
- Allen, Cherie, *Playing with Picturebooks: Postmodernism and the Postmodernesque* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012)
- Alther, Lisa, *Kinflicks* (Virago, 1999), p.17.
- Anderson, Cecilia Catlett, and Marilyn Fain Apseloff, *Nonsense Literature for Children: Aesop to Seuss* (Hamden, CT: Shoe String Press, 1989).
- Anne Trenskey, 'The Bad Boy in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction', *The Georgia Review*, vol. 27, no. 4 (Winter 1973), pp503-17.
- Appell, Anette Ruth, 'The Prepolitical Child of Child-Centered Jurisprudence', in Anna Mae Duane (ed.), *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), pp.19-37.
- Ariès, Phillipe, *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962).
- Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen, *Emerging Adulthood*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
- Auster, Paul, *The New York Trilogy* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004).
- Bacchilega, Cristina, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); and Kevin Paul Smith, *The Postmodern Fairytale: Folkloric Intertexts in Contemporary Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).
- Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Helene Iwolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984).
- Baillie, Justine, *Toni Morrison and Literary Tradition: The Invention of an Aesthetic* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).
- Baillie, Justine, *Toni Morrison and the Literary Tradition: The Invention of an Aesthetic* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

- Baker, Anthony, 'Recognizing Jake: Contending with Formulaic and Spectacularized Representations of Autism in Film', in Mark Olsteen (ed.) *Autism and Representation* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), pp.229-43.
- Baker, Jean, 'Depression and suicidal ideation among academically talented adolescents', *Gifted Child Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (1995), pp.218-223.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Problems of Dostoyevsky and his Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp.113-17.
- Ball, Stephen (ed.), *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).
- Ball, Stephen J, (ed.), *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).
- Bambara, Toni Cade, *Gorilla, My Love* (New York; Toronto: Vintage, 1992).
- Bamberger, William Charles, *43 Views of Steve Katz* (Cabin John, MD: Wildside Press, 2007).
- Barnett, Michael (ed.), *Paternalism Beyond Borders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
- Barth, John, 'The Literature of Exhaustion', in *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp.62-76.
- Barth, John, 'The Literature of Exhaustion', *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp.62-76.
- Barth, John, *Chimera* (Victoria, TX: Dalkey Archive Press, 2015).
- Barth, John, *Giles Goat-Boy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1987), p.11.
- Barth, John, *Lost in the Funhouse* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988).
- Barth, John, *The Sot-Weed Factor* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1970).
- Barthelme, Donald, *Come Back, Dr Caligari* (New York: Anchor Books, 1965).
- Barthelme, Donald, *Donald Barthelme: Sixty Stories* (St Ives: Penguin, 2003).
- Barthelme, Donald, *Snow White* (New York: Scribner, 1996).
- Barthelme, Donald, *The Dead Father* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004).
- Baudrillard, Jean, 'Game with Vestiges', in Mike Gane (ed.), *Baudrillard Live: Selected Interviews* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.81-97.
- Baudrillard, Jean, *Fatal Strategies* trans. Jim Fleming (London: Pluto Press, 1999).
- Baudrillard, Jean, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).
- Baudrillard, Jean, *The Illusion of the End*, trans. Chris Turner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).
- Beck, Richard, *We Believe the Children: A Moral Panic in the 1980s* (New York: Perseus, 2015).
- Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007).
- Bergenholtz, Rita, 'Toni Morrison's *Sula*: A Satire on Binary Thinking', *African American Review*, Vol. 30, No.1 (1996), pp.88-98.

- Berliner, David, *Losing Culture: Nostalgia, Heritage, and Our Accelerated Times* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020).
- Bernstein, Elizabeth, 'Don't Throw the Small Ones Back', *Publisher's Weekly* (November 18, 1996), p.25.
- Bernstein, Robin *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2011).
- Bernstein, Robin, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2011).
- Berry, Dave, *On Nostalgia* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2020).
- Bertens, Hans, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (Taylor and Francis, 1994).
- Best, Steven and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York and London: The Guildford Press, 1997).
- Bhabha, Homi, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004)
- Blake, Ann, 'Children and Suffering in Shakespeare's Plays', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 23, Early Shakespeare Special Number (1993), pp.293-304.
- Blos, Peter, 'Prolonged adolescence: The formulation of a syndrome and its therapeutic implications', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1954), pp.733-742.
- Böckler, Nils, Thorsten Seeger, Peter Sitzler, Wilhelm Heitmeyer, 'School Shootings: Conceptual Framework and International Empirical Trends', in Böckler, Seeger, Sitzler and Heitmeyer (eds.), *School Shootings: International Research, Case Studies, and Concepts for Prevention* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), pp.1-25.
- Booker, M. Keith, *Postmodern Hollywood: What's New in Film and Why it Makes us Feel So Strange* (Westport, Ct: Praeger Publishing, 2007).
- Boswell, Marshall, *Understanding David Foster Wallace* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).
- Bowen, James, *A History of Western Education, Vol. III* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003).
- Boym, Svetlana, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).
- Bozena, Muchacka, 'Exploratory Play and Cognitive Activity', in Tom Jambor and Jan van Gils (eds.), *Several Perspectives on Children's Play*, (Antwerp: Garant, 2007), pp.79-104.
- Bozoglan, Bahadır (ed.), *Psychological, Social and Cultural Aspects of Internet Addiction* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2017).
- Braunstein, Peter, 'Forever Young: Insurgent Youth and the Sixties Culture of Rejuvenation', in Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (ed.), *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s* (New York; London: Routledge, 2002), pp.243-274.
- Brautigan, Richard, *Trout Fishing in America* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2014).
- Breitenberg, Mark, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- Bremner, Robert and John Barnard (eds.), *Children and Youth in America 1600-1865: A Documentary History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).
- Breton, André, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), pp.1-49.

- Broer, Lawrence, *Sanity Plea: Schizophrenia in the Novels of Kurt Vonnegut* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994).
- Brogan, Kathleen, 'Haunted by History: Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*', *Prospects*, Vol. 21, 1996, pp.169-192.
- Brooks, Victor, *Last Season of Innocence: The Teen Experience in the 1960s* (Plymouth, Rowman and Littlefield, 2012).
- Brown, Kevin, 'The Psychiatrists Were Right: Anomic Alienation in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*', *South Central Review*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer 2011).
- Bruhm, Steven and Natasha Hurley, *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).
- Burke, Ruth, *The Games of Poetics: Ludic Criticism and Postmodern Fiction* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).
- Burroughs, William, *Exterminator!* (St Ives: Penguin, 2008).
- Burroughs, William, *Naked Lunch* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009).
- Burroughs, William, *Nova Express* (London: Penguin, 2010).
- Burroughs, William, *The Soft Machine* (London: Flamingo, 1995).
- Burroughs, William, *The Ticket that Exploded* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010).
- Burroughs, William, *The Wild Boys* (New York; Grove Press, 1971).
- Burt, Christopher, and K. Strongman, 'Use of Images in Charity Advertising: Improving Donations and Compliance Rates', *International Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, Vol. 8, No. 8 (2005), pp.571-80.
- Butler, Christopher, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- Butler, Judith, 'Contingent foundations: Feminism and the question of "postmodernism"', in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1983), pp.153-170.
- Caesar, Terry, 'A Note on Pynchon's Naming', *Pynchon Notes*, Vol. 5 (1981), pp.5-10.
- Calinescu, Matei, 'Postmodernism and some Paradoxes of Periodization', in Douwe W. Fokkema and Hans Bertens (eds.), *Approaching Postmodernism* (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1986), pp.239-54.
- Cart, Michael, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2010).
- Carter, Cynthia, and C. Kay Weaver, *Violence and the Media* (Buckingham & Philadelphia, Open University Press, 2003).
- Casey, Zachary, *A Pedagogy of Anticapitalist Antiracism: Whiteness, Neoliberalism, and Resistance in Education* (New York: SUNY Press, 2016).
- Chernin, Kim, *Womansize: the Tyranny of Slenderness* (London: The Women's Press, 1983).
- Chetwynd, Ali, Joanna Freer and Georgios Maragos (eds.), *Pynchon, Sex and Gender* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018).
- Chrostowska, S. D., 'Consumed by Nostalgia', *SubStance*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2010), pp.52-70.
- Chudacoff, Howard, *Children at Play: An American History* (New York: NYU Press, 2007).

- Cixous, Helene, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. Keith and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer 1976), pp.875-893.
- Clare, Ralph, 'The Politics of Boredom and the Boredom of Politics in David Foster Wallace's *The Pale King*', *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 44, No. 4, (Winter 2012), pp.428-446.
- Clemens, Victoria, "'A Powerful and Thrilling Voice': The Significance of Crazy Bet", in Lucinda Damon-Bach and Victoria Clemens (ed.), *Catharine Maria Sedgwick: Critical Perspectives* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2003), pp.40-52.
- Cobb, Nancy, *Adolescence: Continuity, Change and Diversity* (California City: Mayfield, 1995).
- Coffey, Amanda, and Sara Delamont, *Feminism and the Classroom Teacher: Research, Practice and Pedagogy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).
- Cohen, Karl, *Forbidden Animation: Censored Cartoons and Blacklisted Animators in America* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013), pp.17-19.
- Cohen, Patricia, *In Our Prime: The Invention of Middle Age* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2012).
- Cohen, Samuel, 'The Whiteness of David Foster Wallace', in Len Platt and Sara Upstone (eds.), *Postmodern Literature and Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.228-243.
- Coleridge, Samuel, *The Friend: A Series of Essays* (London: Gale & Curtis, 1812).
- Collins, Jim, 'Television and Postmodernism', in R.C. Allen (ed.), *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled* (University of North Carolina Press, 1992) pp.327-353
- Connor, Marc C., 'Modernity and the Homeless: Toni Morrison and the Fictions of Modernism', in Adrienne Lanier Seward and Justine Tally (eds.), *Toni Morrison: Memory and Meaning* (University of Mississippi Press), pp.19-32.
- Coontz, Stephanie, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).
- Coover, Robert, *Pricksongs and Descants* (New York & Scarborough: Plume Books, 1969).
- Coover, Robert, *The Cat in the Hat for President: A Political Fable* (London: Foxrock/OR, 2018).
- Cope, Jackson, *Robert Coover's Fictions* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986).
- Coudert, Allison, 'Educating Girls in Early Modern Europe and America', in Albrecht Classen (ed.), *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: The Results of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality* (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2005), pp.389-414.
- Coudert, Allison, "Educating Girls in Early Modern Europe and America", in Albrecht Classen (ed.), *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: The Results of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality* (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2005), pp389-414.
- Coveney, Peter, *The Image of Childhood* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).
- Cowart, David, 'Attenuated Postmodernism: Pynchon's *Vineland*', in Geoffrey Greene, Donald J. Grenier and Larry McCaffrey (eds.), *The Vineland Papers* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994), pp.3-13.
- Cowart, David, 'Prolonged Periodization American Fiction After 1960', in Paula Geyh (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern American Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp.28-46.
- Cowart, David, *Thomas Pynchon and the Dark Passages of History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

- Cox, Roger, *Shaping Childhood: Themes of uncertainty in adult-child relationships* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996).
- Craig, David, *Tilting at Morality: Narrative Strategies in Joseph Heller's Fiction* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997).
- Cross, Gary, 'Historical roots of consumption-based nostalgia for childhood in the United States', in Elisabeth Wesseling (ed.), *Reinventing Childhood Nostalgia: Books, Toys, and Contemporary Media Culture* (Routledge, 2018), pp.19-35.
- Cross, Gary, *Consumed Nostalgia: Memory in the Age of Fast Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).
- Cullen, Frank, Florence Hackman and Donald McNeilly (eds.), *Vaudeville Old and New: An Encyclopedia of Variety Performers in America, Vol. 1* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007).
- Cunningham, Hugh, *The Invention of Childhood* (London: BBC Books, 2006).
- Currie, Mark, *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1998).
- Czarnowus, Anna, *Inscription on the Body: Monstrous Children in Middle English Literature* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2009), p.10.
- Dalsgård, Katherine, 'The one all-black town worth the pain: (African) American exceptionalism, historical narration, and the critique of nationhood in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*', *African American Review*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Summer 2001), pp.233-58.
- Davies, Jason, *Rome's Religious History: Livy, Tacitus and Ammianus on their Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- Davis, Fred, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (London: The Free Press, 1979).
- Davis, Kimberley Chabot, "'Postmodern Blackness': Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the End of History", *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), pp.242-260.
- de Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009).
- de Bourcier, Simon, 'Representations of Sexualized Children and Child Abuse in Thomas Pynchon's Fiction' in Ali Chetwynd, Joanna Freer and Georgios Maragos (eds.), *Pynchon, Sex and Gender* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), pp.145-161.
- de Laurentis, Teresa, 'Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation', *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No.2 (May 1968), pp.155-177.
- DeLillo, Don, *Americana* (St Ives: Penguin, 2006).
- DeLillo, Don, *Ratner's Star* (London: Picador, 2016).
- DeLillo, Don, *The Names*, (London: Picador, 2011)
- DeLillo, Don, *Underworld* (London: Picador, 2015).
- DeLillo, Don, *White Noise* (New York: Picador, 2011).
- Denzin, Norman, 'Postmodern Social Theory', *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Autumn 1986), pp.194-204.
- Derrida, Jacques, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp.351-370.

Detlaff Alan, and Reiko Boyd, 'Racial Disproportionality and Disparities in the Child Welfare System: Why Do They Exist, and What Can Be Done to Address Them?', *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 692, No. 1 (Nov. 2020), pp. 253–274.

DeWitt, Helen, *The Last Samurai* (London: Vintage, 2018).

Dickens, Charles, *Nicholas Nickleby* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008).

Dickson, Gary, *The Children's Crusade: Medieval History, Modern Mythistory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

Didion, Joan, 'Slouching Towards Bethlehem', in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem: Essays* (London: 4th Estate, 2017), pp.84-129.

Doty, Roxanne Lynn, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

Douglas, William, *Television Families: Is Something Wrong in Suburbia?* (Mahwahm, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003), pp.7-8.

Drezner, Daniel, *The Toddler-in-Chief: What Donald Trump Teaches Us About the Modern Presidency* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

Dube, Shanta, 'Twenty Years and Counting: The past, present and future of ACEs research', in Gordon J.G. Asmunson and Tracie O. Afifi (eds.), *Adverse Childhood Experiences: Using Evidence to Advance Research, Practice, Policy, and Prevention* (Academic Press, 2020), pp.3-16.

Dubey, Madhu, 'Contemporary African American Fiction and the Politics of Postmodernism', *Novel*, Vol. 35, No. 2-3 (Spring-Summer 2002), pp.151-168.

Dubey, Madhu, *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

DuBois, William Edward Burghardt, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903).

Ducornet, Rikki, *The Stain* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995).

Duvall, John, *The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and Postmodern Blackness* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

Ebbesen, Jeffrey, *Postmodernism and Its Others* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Eco, Umberto, 'Travels in Hyperreality', trans. William Weaver, in *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt, 1986), pp.1-58.

Elias, Amy J. Elias, *Sublime Desire: History and Post-1960s Fiction* (London; Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press).

Elkind, David, *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon* (New York: Hachette Books, 1988);

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 'Education', in James E. Cabot (ed.), *Lectures and Biographical Sketches* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1883), pp.101-128.

Engles, Tim, "'Who are you, literally?'" Fantasies of the White Self in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*', in Hugh Ruppersburg and Tim Engles (eds.), *Critical Essays on Don DeLillo* (New York: G.K. Hall and Co, 2000), pp.170-95.

Engles, Tim, *White Male Nostalgia in Contemporary North American Literature* (Switzerland: Springer, 2018).

- Engles, Tim, *White Male Nostalgia in Contemporary North American Literature* (London and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018).
- Erdrich, Louise, *Love Medicine* (London: Flamingo, 1994).
- Erdrich, Louise, *The Bingo Palace* (New York: Perennial, 2001).
- Erdrich, Louise, *Tracks* (New York: Henry Holt, 1988).
- Etelson, Erica, *For Our Own Good: The Politics of Parenting in an Ailing Society* (Berkeley, CA: Left Coast Press, 2010).
- Evans, Sara, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Random House, 1979).
- Eve, Martin Paul, *Pynchon and Philosophy: Wittgenstein, Foucault and Adorno* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
- Evenson, Brian, *Understanding Robert Coover* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).
- Everett, Percival, *Glyph* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 1999).
- Ewers, Hans-Heino, *Fundamental Concepts of Children's Literature Research*, trans. William J. McCann (New York & London: Routledge, 2009).
- Eyerman, Ron, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- Fanon, Franz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967).
- Fariña, Richard, *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up to Me*, (New York; London: Penguin, 1996).
- Fass, Paula, 'The Child-Centered Family? New Rules in Postwar America', in *Reinventing Childhood After World War II*, ed. Paula S. Fass and Michael Grossberg (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), pp.1-18 (pp.1-2).
- Fegin, Joe, *The White Racial Frame* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013).
- Femaglich, Kirsten, *American Dreams and Nazi Nightmares: Early Holocaust Consciousness and Liberal America, 1957-65* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2007).
- Ferguson, Robert, 'Rip Van Winkle and the Generational Divide in American Culture', *Early American Literature*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2005), pp.529-44.
- Fiedler, Leslie, 'Cross the Border—Close the Gap', in *A New Fiedler Reader* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1999), pp.270-94.
- Fiedler, Leslie, 'The New Mutants', *Partisan Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Fall 1965), pp.505-525 (p.509).
- Fiedler, Leslie, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Champaign, ILL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2003).
- Fink, Moritz, *The Simpsons: A Cultural History* (Lanham, MD; Rowman and Littlefield, 2019).
- Firestone, Shulamith *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971); Jane Helleiner, 'Toward a Feminist Anthropology of Childhood', *Atlantis*, Vol. 24, No. 1, (Fall/Winter 1999), pp.27-37.
- Fisher, Mark, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: O Books, 2009).

- Fitzpatrick, Kathleen, *The Anxiety of Obsolescence: The American Novel in the Age of Television* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006).
- Fitzpatrick, Kathleen, *The Anxiety of Obsolescence: The American Novel in the Age of Television* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006).
- Fletcher, Judith, *Myths of the Underworld in Contemporary Culture: The Backward Gaze* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
- Ford, Julian, *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Scientific and Professional Dimensions* (Burlington, MA: Academic Press, 2009).
- Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).
- Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest*, No. 16 (1989), pp.3-18.
- Fraser, Nancy, *Fortunes of Feminism* (London; NY: Verso, 2013).
- Freer, Joanna, *Thomas Pynchon and the American Counterculture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
- Fukuyama, Francis, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest*, No. 16 (1989), pp. 3–18.
- Gabilliet, Jean-Paul, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*, trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2009).
- Gane, Michael, *Jean Baudrillard: In Radical Uncertainty* (London; Sterling, VI: Pluto Press, 2000).
- Garber, Marjorie, *Coming of Age in Shakespeare* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).
- Gargano, Elizabeth, 'Oral Narrative and Ojibwa Story Cycles in Louise Erdrich's *Birchbark House and Game of Silence*', in Michelle Pagni Stewart and Yvonne Atkinson (eds.), *Ethnic Literary Traditions in American Children's Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
- Gates, Henry Louis, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- Gatlin, Rochelle, *American Women Since 1945* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1987).
- Gauthier, Marni, 'The Other Side of *Paradise*: Toni Morrison's (Un)Making of Mythic History', *African American Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Fall, 2005), pp.395-414.
- Gauthier, Marni, *Amnesia and Redress in Contemporary American Fiction* (London and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).
- Gavin, Adrienne, 'The Child in British Literature: An Introduction', in Adrienne E. Gavin (ed.), *The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary* (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), pp.1-20.
- Genter, Robert, 'Proto-Postmodernism', in Steven Belletto (ed.), *American Literature in Transition 1950-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp.195-208.
- Gerhard, Jane, *Desiring Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).
- Giaimo, Paul, *Appreciating Don DeLillo: The Moral Force of a Writer's Work* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), pp.83-4.
- Gill, Natasha, *Educational Philosophy in the French Enlightenment* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016)

- Gittins, Diana, 'The historical construction of childhood', in Sharon Stephens (ed.), *Children and the Politics of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp.25-38 (p.25).
- Glenn, Jason, 'Making Crack Babies: Race Discourse and the Biologization of Behaviour', in Laurie B. Green, John McKiernan-Gonzalez, Martin Summers (eds.), *Contested Histories of Race and Health in North America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), pp.237-60.
- Goldberg, Arthur, 'Juvenatics: Study of Prolonged Adolescence', *The Clearing House*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (December 1966), pp.218-222.
- Goldstein, E., Topitzes, J., Miller-Cribbs, J. *et al*, 'Influence of race/ethnicity and income on the link between adverse childhood experiences and child flourishing', *Pediatric Research* (2020), pp.1-9.
- Gore, Mary Elizabeth, *Raising PG Kids in an X-rated Society* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983).
- Graff, Harvey, *Conflicting Paths: Growing Up in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
- Grausam, Daniel, *On Endings: American Postmodernist Fiction and the Cold War* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2011).
- Green, Jeremy, 'Libra', in J. Duvall (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 94-107.
- Green, Jeremy, *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
- Grieve, Victoria, *Little Cold Warriors: American Childhood in the 1950s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
- Gubar, Marah, 'The Drama of Precocity: Child Performers on the Victorian Stage', in Dennis Denisoff (ed.) *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2008), pp.63-78.
- Gubar, Marah, *Artful Dodgers, Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- Gunne, Sorch, and Zoë Brigley Thompson, (eds.) *Feminism, Literature and Rape Narratives: Violence and Violation* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010).
- Gunter, Barrie, *The Effects of Video Games on Children: The Myth Unmasked* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).
- Halliday, Aria S. (ed.), *The Black Girlhood Studies Collection* (Toronto: Women's Press, 2019).
- Harp, Kathi, and Amanada M. Bunting, 'The Racialized Nature of Child Welfare Policies and the Social Control of Black Bodies', *Social Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer 2020), pp.258-281.
- Harper, Phillip Brian, *Framing the Margins: The Social Logic of Postmodern Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- Harris, Bertha, *Confessions of a Cherubino* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972).
- Harris, Daryl, 'Postmodernist Diversions in African American Thought', *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (November 2005), pp.209-228.
- Hartman, Andrew, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
- Harvey, David, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990).

- Hassan, Ihab, 'The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Reflections on Modern Culture, Language and Literature', *The American Scholar*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Summer, 1963), pp. 463-484.
- Hayes, Emma, 'Betwixt-and-between: Liminality in Golden Age Children's Literature', Ph.D. thesis (Deakin University, 2018), retrieved from <https://dro.deakin.edu.au/eserv/DU:30116551/hayes-betwixtandbetween-2018.pdf> (25/01/2021).
- Hayes-Brady, Clare, *The Unspeakable Failure of David Foster Wallace: Language, Identity and Resistance* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017).
- Hayles, Nancy Katherine, "'Who Was Saved?'" Families, Snitches, and Recuperation in Pynchon's *Vineland*', in Geoffrey Greene, Donald J. Grenier and Larry McCaffrey (eds.), *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon's Novel* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994), pp.14-30.
- Hedegaard, Holly, Sally C. Curtin, and Margaret Warner, 'Suicide Mortality in the United States, 1999-2017', *NCHS Data Brief*, No. 330 (November 2018), pp.1-8.
- Hefferan, Teresa, 'Beloved and the Problem of Mourning', *Studies in the Novel*, Winter 1998, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Winter 1998), pp.558-73.
- Heinemann, Isabel, 'Inventing the Modern American Family: Family Values and Social Change in 20th Century United States', in Isabel Heinemann (ed.), *Inventing the Modern American Family* (Frankfurt; New York: Campus Verlag, 2012), pp.7-29.
- Heller, Agnes, 'Existentialism, Alienation, Postmodernism: Cultural Movements as Vehicles of Change in Everyday Life', in Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon (ed.), *A Postmodern Reader* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp.497-510.
- Heller, Dana, 'Reconstructing Kin: Family, History, and Narrative in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*', *College Literature*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (June 1994), pp.105-117.
- Heller, Joseph, *Catch-22* (London: Vintage, 1994).
- Hendershot, Heather, *Saturday Morning Censors: Television Regulation before the V-chip* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998).
- Herman, Judith Lewis, *Father-Daughter Incest* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).
- Herman, Judith Lewis, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).
- Hicks, Stephen, *Explaining Postmodernism: Scepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault* (Tempe, AZ: Scholargy Publishing, 2004).
- Hilton, Mary, and Jill Shefrin (eds.), *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2009).
- Hodgson, Lucia, 'Childhood of the Race: A Critical Race Theory Intervention into Childhood Studies' in Anna Mae Duane (ed.), *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), pp.38-51.
- Hoffman, Abbie, *Steal This Book* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995).
- Hogue, W. Lawrence, *Postmodern American Literature and its Other* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009).
- Holland, Mary, *Succeeding Postmodernism: Language and Humanism in Contemporary American Literature* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

- Hollindale, Peter, *Signs of Childness in Children's Books* (Stroud: Thimble, 1997).
- Hollindale, Peter, *Signs of Childness in Children's Books* (Stroud: Thimble, 1997).
- hooks, bell, 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness', *The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 1989, No. 36 (1989), pp. 15-23.
- hooks, bell, 'postmodern blackness', in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), pp.23-32.
- hooks, bell, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015).
- Houen, Alex, *Powers of Possibility: Experimental American Writing since the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- Houser, Heather, *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and Affect* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).
- Høyrup, Helene, 'The Origins of Modernism in Fairy-Tale: Hans Christian Andersen's Authorship and Canon Studies', in Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and Anja Müller (eds.), *Canon Constitution and Canon Change in Children's Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), pp.105-118.
- http://www.tvhistory.tv/Annual_TV_Households_50-78.JPG, "Number of TV Households in America 1950-1978," *The American Century*, accessed June 18, 2019, <https://omeka.wlu.edu/americancentury/items/show/136>.
- Hughes, Christopher, *Liberal Democracy as the End of History: Fukayama and Postmodern Challenges* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).
- Hughes, Langston, 'The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain', *The Nation* (23 June, 1926), pp.692-694
- Hume, Kathryn, 'Diffused Satire in Contemporary American Fiction', *Modern Philology*, Vol. 105, No.2 (November 2007), pp.300-325.
- Hume, Kathryn, 'Pynchon's Mythological Histories', in Harold Bloom (ed.) *Thomas Pynchon* (Broomall, PA: Chelsea House Publishers), pp.131-144.
- Hume, Kathryn, 'Robert Coover: The Metaphysics of Bondage', *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 98, No. 4 (October 2003), pp.827-41.
- Hume, Kathryn, 'The Religious and Political Vision of *Against the Day*', in Jeffrey Severs and Christopher Leise (eds.), *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide* (Newark, DEL: University of Delaware Press, 2011), pp.167-190.
- Hunter, Shona, *Power, Politics and the Emotions: Impossible Governance?* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015).
- Hutcheon, Linda, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York & London: Routledge, 1988).
- Hutcheon, Linda, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).
- Huyssen, Andreas, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986).
- Huyssen, Andreas, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).
- Inglis, Laura Lynn and Peter Klaus Steinfeld, *Old Dead White Men's Philosophy* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2000).

- Irigary, Luce, 'The Question of the Other', *Yale French Studies*, No. 87 (1995), pp.7-19.
- Iruka, Theoma, Stephanie M. Curenton and Tonia R. Durden, 'Chapter 1: Introduction', in Iruka, Curenton and Durden (eds.), *African American Children in Early Childhood Education* (Bingley: Emerald Publishing Ltd, 2017), pp.3-14.
- Irving, Washington, *Rip Van Winkle and Other Stories* (St Ives: Puffin Books, 2010).
- Ivy, Marilyn, 'Have You Seen Me? Recovering the Inner Child in Late Twentieth Century America', in Sharon Stephens (ed.), *Children and the Politics of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp.79-104.
- Ivy, Marilyn, 'Have You Seen Me? Recovering the Inner Child in Late Twentieth-Century America', *Social Text*, No. 37 (Winter, 1993), pp.227-252.
- Jagger, Gill, and Caroline Wright (eds.), *Changing Family Values* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).
- James, Henry, 'The Turn of the Screw', in T.J. Lustig (ed.) *The Turn of the Screw and Other Stories* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), pp.113-236.
- Jameson, Fredric, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1983), pp.111-25.
- Jameson, Fredric, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).
- Jameson, Fredric, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).
- Jarvis, Christina, 'The Vietnamization of World War II in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Gravity's Rainbow*', in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), pp.61-84.
- Jenkins, Henry, 'Childhood Innocence and Other Myths', in Henry Jenkins (ed.), *The Children's Culture Reader* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998), pp.1-37.
- Jennifer Miskec and Annette Wannamaker (eds.), *The Early Reader in Children's Literature* (New York & London: Routledge, 2016).
- Jones, Susan and Debra Myhill, 'Troublesome Boys and Compliant Girls: Gender Identities and Perceptions of Achievement and Underachievement', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 25, No. 5 (November 2004), pp.547-561.
- Jong, Erica, *Fanny: Being the True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones* (London & New York: Norton, 2003).
- Jong, Erica, *Fear of Flying* (London; Vintage, 1998).
- Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, *The Rebel Sell: How the Counterculture Became Consumer Culture* (Sussex: Capstone, 2006).
- Josephidou, Jo, and Polly Bolshaw (eds.), *Understanding Gender and Early Childhood: An Introduction to the Key Debates* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).
- Joyce, James, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 2000).
- Joyce, Patrick, 'History and Postmodernism', *Past and Present*, No. 133, (November 1991), pp.204-209.
- Kammen, Michael, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

- Karshan, Thomas, *Vladimir Nabakov and the Art of Play* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- Kasson, John, *The Little Girl Who Fought the Great Depression* (London and New York: Norton, 2014).
- Katharina Niemeyer (ed.), *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present, and Future* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).
- Katz, Steve, *Creamy and Delicious: Eat My Words (In Other Words)* (New York: Random House, 1970).
- Katz, Steve, *The Exaggerations of Peter Prince* (New York; Chicago; San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968).
- Kearney, Mary Celeste, 'Coalescing: The Development of Girls' Studies', *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 21, No.1 (Spring 2009), pp.1-28.
- Kehily, Mary Jane, 'Understanding childhood: an introduction to some key themes and issues', in Mary Jane Kehily (ed.), *An Introduction to Childhood Studies* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2004), pp.1-21.
- Kelley, Joyce, 'Caution—Children at Play', in Joyce E. Kellet (ed.) *Children's Play in Literature: Investigating the Strengths and the Subversions of the Playing Child* (New York & London: Routledge, 2019), pp.1-23.
- Kelly, Adam, 'David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction', in David Hering (ed.), *Consider David Foster Wallace: Critical Essays* (Los Angeles; Austin: Sideshow Media Group Press, 2010), pp.131-146.
- Keogh, Brendan, 'Pokémon GO, the novelty of nostalgia, and the ubiquity of the smartphone', *Mobile Media and Communication*, vol. 5, no. 1, (2017), pp.38-41.
- Kermode, Frank, 'That Was Another Planet', *London Review of Books* (8 February 1990).
- Key, Ellen, *The Century of the Child* (Frankfurt am Main: Outlook, 2020).
- Kharperian, Theodore D., *A Hand to Turn the Time: The Menippean Satires of Thomas Pynchon* (Rutherford and Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990).
- Kiley, Dan, *Peter Pan Syndrome: The Men Who Have Never Grown Up* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1983).
- Kincaid, James, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- Kincaid, James, *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998).
- Kincheloe, Joe, 'The New Childhood: Home Alone as a Way of Life', in *Key Works in Critical Pedagogy* (Rotterdam: Sense, 2011), pp.129-47.
- Kincheloe, Joe, 'Consuming the All-American Corporate Burger: McDonald's "Does It All For You"', in Jennifer A. Sandlin and Peter McLaren (eds.), *Critical Pedagogies of Consumption*, (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp.137-47.
- King, Wilma, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011).
- Kirby, Alan, *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture* (New York & London: Continuum, 2009).
- Kleber, Rolf, Charles Figley, and Berthold Gersons, (eds), *Beyond Trauma: Cultural and Societal Dynamics*, (New York: Plenum, 1995).
- Kline, Stephen, *Out of the Garden: Toys, TV, and Children's Culture in the Age of Marketing* (London; New York: Verso, 1993).

- Klinkowitz, Jerome, *Donald Barthelme: An Exhibition* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1991).
- Knowles, Katie, 'Drama', in Anna French (ed.), *Early Modern Childhood: An Introduction* (New York and Oxford: Routledge), pp.237-60.
- Knowles, Katie, 'Shakespeare's 'terrible infants'? Children in *Richard III*, *King John* and *Macbeth*', in Gavin (ed.) *The Child in British Literature*, pp.38-53.
- Knowles, Katie, *Shakespeare's Boys: A Cultural History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).
- Kolbuszewska, Sofia, "'It Has to Be More Than the Simple Conditioning of a Child, Once Upon a Time': The Use of the Child in *Gravity's Rainbow*", *Pynchon Notes*, Vol.42-3 (1998) pp.111-20.
- Kompare, Derek, *Rerun Nation: How Repeats Invented American Television* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2005).
- Konstantinou, Lee, 'Punk's Positive Dystopia', in *Cool Characters: Irony and American Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).
- Koplewicz, Harold, and Emily Klaas (eds.), *Depression in Children and Adolescents* (London: Routledge, 2017).
- Kowart, Rachel, and Thorsten Quandt (eds.), *The Video Game Debate: Unravelling the Physical, Social and Psychological Effects of Digital Games* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016).
- Kruse, Kevin, *Fault-Lines: A History of the United States Since 1974* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2019).
- Kuhn, Reinhard, *Corruption in Paradise: The Child in Western Literature* (Hanover; London: University Press of New England, 1982).
- Kupferberg, Tuli, 'The Love of Politics and the Politics of Love', *East Village Other* (1-15 May 1967), pp.4-5.
- Kupferberg, Tuli, *1001 Ways to Beat the Draft* (New York: Oliver Layton Press, 1966).
- Kupferberg, Tuli, and Sylvia Topp, *As They Were* (New York: Links, 1973).
- Kurup, Seema, *Understanding Louise Erdrich* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2015).
- Kutner, Lawrence, and Cheryl Olson, *Grand Theft Childhood: The Surprising Truth about Violent Video Games* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008).
- Lane, Kathryn, 'How was the Nerd or Geek Born?', in Kathryn Lane (ed.) *Age of the Geek: Depictions of Nerds and Geeks in Popular Media* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), pp.1-20.
- Lasch, Christopher, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (W.W. Norton & Co, 1991).
- Lear, Edward, *The Nonsense Verse* (St Ives: Random House, 2012).
- LeClair, Tom, *The Art of Excess: Mastery in Contemporary Fiction* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989).
- Leggat, Matthew, *Cultural and Political Nostalgia in the Age of Terror: the Melancholic Sublime* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).
- Lemke-Santangelo, Gretchen, *Daughters of Aquarius* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009).
- Lentricchia, Frank, 'Libra as Postmodern Critique', in Frank Lentricchia (ed.), *Introducing Don DeLillo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp193-215.

- Levander, Caroline, *Cradle of Liberty: Race, the Child, and National Belonging from Thomas Jefferson to W.E.B. DuBois* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2006).
- Livingstone, Sonia, and Leslie Haddon (eds.), *Kids Online: Opportunities and Risks for Children* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2009).
- Lock, Helen, 'A Man's Story is His Gris-gris: Ishmael Reed's Neo-HooDoo Aesthetic and the African-American Tradition', *South Central Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring 1993), pp.67-77.
- Lodge, David, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy and the Typology of Modern Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).
- Lubiano, Wahneema, 'The Postmodernist Rag: Political Identity and the Vernacular in Song of Solomon', in Valerie Smith (ed.), *New Essays on Song of Solomon*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.93-116.
- Luckhurst, Roger, *The Trauma Question* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2008).
- Lytard, Jean Francois, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
- MacDonald, Ian, *Revolution in the Head: The Beatles' Records and the Sixties*, 2nd ed. (London: Vintage, 2008), p.216.
- Malkovich, Ambery, *Charles Dickens and the Victorian Child: Romanticizing and Socializing the Imperfect Child* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).
- Malpas, Simon, and Andrew Taylor, *Thomas Pynchon*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).
- Malpas, Simon, *The Postmodern* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005)
- Maltby, Paul, *Dissident Postmodernists: Barthelme, Coover, Pynchon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).
- Marcus, Leah, *Childhood and Cultural Despair: A Theme and Variations in Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978).
- Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 'The Return to the Sacred Path: Healing the Historical Trauma Response among the Lakota', *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, Vol. 68, no. 3 (1998), pp.287-305.
- Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 'The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and Its Relationship with Substance Abuse: A Lakota Illustration', *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, Vol. 35, No.1 (2003) pp.7-13.
- Marohn, Richard, 'A Re-examination of Peter Blos's concept of prolonged adolescence' in Esman (ed.), *Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 23 (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp.3-17.
- Maso, Carole, 'Rupture, Verge, and Precipice/Precipice, Verge, and Hurt Not', in *Break Every Rule: Essays on Longing, Language, and Moments of Desire* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2000), pp.161-91.
- Maso, Carole, *Defiance* (New York, London: Plume, 1998).
- Matus, Jill, *Toni Morrison* (Manchester and New York: University of Manchester Press, 1998).
- May, Elaine Tyler, "'Family Values': The Uses and Abuses of American Family History", *Revue française d'études américaines*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (2003), pp.7-22.
- McCaffrey, Larry, 'An Expanded Interview with David Foster Wallace', in Stephen J. Burn (ed.) *Conversations with David Foster Wallace* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), pp.21-52 (p.48).

- McCaffrey, Larry, 'Donald Barthelme and the Metafictional Muse', *SubStance*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Issue 27 (1980), pp.75-88.
- McChesney, Robert, 'Introduction', in Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998), pp.7-16.
- McGillis, Roderick, 'Irony and Performance: The Romantic Child', in Gavin (ed.), *The Child in British Literature*, pp.101-115 (p.102); see also William Stroup, 'The Romantic Child', *Literature Compass*, 1:1 (2004), pp.1-5.
- McGurl, Mark, 'The Institution of Nothing: David Foster Wallace in The Program', *Boundary 2*, Vol. 41, No.3 (Fall 2014), pp.27-54.
- McGurl, Mark, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp.264-5.
- McHale, Brian, *Postmodernist Fiction* (Taylor and Francis, 1987).
- McHale, Brian, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- McKie, Linda, *Families, Violence and Social Change* (Maidenhead and New York: Open University Press, 2005).
- McLaughlin, Robert, 'Post-Postmodern Discontent: Contemporary Fiction and the Social World', *symplekē*, Vol. 12, No.1-2 (2004), pp.53-68.
- McLeod, Hugh, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- Melley, Timothy, 'Bodies Incorporated: Scenes of Agency Panic in Gravity's Rainbow', *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Winter 1994), pp.709-738.
- Mendelson, Edward, *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Pearson Education Ltd, 1976).
- Merish, Lori, 'Cuteness and Commodity Aesthetics: Tom Thumb and Shirley Temple', in Rosemary Garland Thomson (ed.), *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp.185-203.
- Mikics, David, 'Postmodern Fictions', in Josephine G. Hendin (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Postwar American Literature and Culture* ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp.187-209.
- Miller, Dean, *The Epic Hero* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 2000).
- Miller, Eric, 'Cyberloneliness: The Curse of the Cursor', in Sagan and Miller (eds.), *Narratives of Loneliness*, pp.41-51.
- Miller, John, *Transcendental Learning: The Educational Legacy of Alcott, Emerson, Thoreau, Peabody, and Thoreau* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing Inc., 2011).
- Mintz, Alan, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2001).
- Mintz, Steven, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004).
- Mire, Amina, *Wellness in Whiteness: Biomedicalization and the Promotion of Whiteness and Youth Amongst Women* (New York and London: Routledge, 2020).
- Mitchell, Angelyn, *The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery, and Gender in Contemporary Black Women's Fiction* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

- Mitchell, David T, and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).
- Mitchell, David T, and Sharon L. Snyder, *The Biopolitics of Disability: Neoliberalism, Ablenationalism and Peripheral Embodiment* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).
- Mittell, Jason, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).
- Montgomery, Heather *An Introduction to Childhood: Anthropological Perspectives on Children's Lives* (Malden, MA; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
- Montgomery, Heather, 'Childhood in Time and Place', in Martin Woodhead and Heather Montgomery (eds.), *Understanding Childhood: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Chichester: John Wiley, 2003), pp.45-74.
- Moore, Stephen, 'A Conversation with Carole Maso', *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Fall 1994), pp.186-91.
- Moore, Thomas, *The Style of Connectedness: Gravity's Rainbow and Thomas Pynchon* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987).
- Moretta, John Anthony, *The Hippies: A 1960s History* (Jefferson, McFarland & Co., 2017).
- Morrison, Toni, 'The Site of Memory', in William Zinsser (ed.), *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, 2d ed. (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), pp.83-102.
- Morrison, Toni, 'Unspeakable Words Unspoken', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp.1-34.
- Morrison, Toni, *Beloved* (London: Vintage, 2016).
- Morrison, Toni, *Jazz* (New York: Plume, 1993).
- Morrison, Toni, *Paradise* (New York: Plume, 1999).
- Morrison, Toni, *Sula* (London: Vintage, 1998).
- Morrison, Toni, *The Bluest Eye* (London: Vintage, 1999).
- Murphy, Joseph, and Catherine Dunn Shiffman, *Understanding and Assessing the Charter School Movement* (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 2002).
- Murphy, Joseph, *Homeschooling in America: Capturing and Assessing the Movement* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2012).
- Murray, Stuart, *Representing Autism: Culture, Narrative, Fascination* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).
- Muth, Katie, 'Postmodern Fiction as Poststructuralist Theory: Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*', *Narrative*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2011), pp.868-110.
- Muther, Elizabeth, 'Bambara's Feisty Girls: Resistance Narratives in "Gorilla, My Love"', *African American Review*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Autumn 2002), pp.447-459.
- Nabakov, Vladimir, *Lolita* (Penguin Books, 1997).
- Naiman, Eric, *Nabokov, Perversely* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).
- Nardinelli, Clark, 'Child Labor and the Factory Acts', *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (December 1980), pp.739-55.

- Nash, Ilana, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in American Popular Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006).
- Nealon, Jeffrey, *Post-Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).
- Neem, Johann, *Democracy's Schools: The Rise of Public Education in America* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2017).
- Neihart, Maureen, 'The impact of giftedness on psychological well-being: What does the empirical literature say?', *Roeper Review: A Journal on Gifted Education*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1999), pp.10-17.
- Neilsen, Aldon Lynn, *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- Nel, Philip, *The Avant-Garde and American Postmodernity* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), pp.73-4.
- Nelson, Claudia, *Precocious Children and Childish Adults: Age Inversion in Victorian Literature* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012).
- Newman, Michael, 'Suffering from Reminiscences', in Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (eds.), *Postmodernism and the Re-Reading of Modernity* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp.84-114 (pp.94-5).
- Newton, Victoria Louise, *Everyday Discourses of Menstruation* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016).
- Ngai, Sianne, 'The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Summer 2005), pp.811-847.
- Ni, Pi-hua, 'Body as Danger: Gender, Race and Body in Toni Morrison's *Sula*', *Ilha do Desterro: A Journal of English Language, Literatures in English and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (Jan 2015), pp.115-126.
- Nichol, Bran, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- Nicholson, Virginia, *How Was it For You?* (London: Penguin, 2019).
- Niehart, Maureen, 'Gifted Children and Depression', in Maureen Niehart, Steven I. Pfeiffer, Tracy L. Cross (eds.), *The Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Children: What Do We Know?* (Washington, DC: Prufrock Press, 2002), pp.93-103.
- O' Brein, John, 'Ishmael Reed', in Bruce Dick and Amritjit Singh (eds.), *Conversations with Ishmael Reed* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1995), pp.14-24.
- O'Malley, Andrew, *The Making of the Modern Child: Children's Literature and Childhood in the Late Eighteenth Century* (New York; London: Routledge, 2003).
- Ochoa, Peggy, 'Morrison's *Beloved*: Allegorically Othering "White" Christianity', *MELUS*, Vol. 24, No. 2, (Summer, 1999), pp. 107-123
- Olsen, Lance 'Linguistic Pratfalls in Barthelme', *South Atlantic Review*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (November 1986), pp.69-77.
- Osgerby, Bill, 'Understanding the "Jackpot Market": Media, Marketing, and the Rise of the American Teenager', in *The Changing Portrayal of Adolescents in the Media since 1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.27-58.

- Owens, Craig, 'The Discourse of Others: Feminism and Postmodernism', in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1983), pp.57-82.
- Partee, Morriss Henry, *Childhood in Shakespeare's Plays* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).
- Pal, Payel, 'Disrupted Childhoods: A Critical Study of Toni Morrison's *Love*', *The Criterion*, Vol. 8, No. 8 (July 2017), pp.366-373.
- Palfrey, John, and Urs Gasser, *Born Digital: How Children Grow Up in a Digital Age* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).
- Parsons, Patrick, *Blue Skies: A History of Cable Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008).
- Pattinson, Robert, *The Child Figure in English Literature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978)
- Pegrum, Mark, *Challenging Modernity: Dada between Modern and Postmodern* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000)
- Pennycook, Alastair, *English and the Discourses of Colonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).
- Perloff, Marjorie, *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
- Peterson, Jordan, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (London: Penguin, 2018).
- Peterson, Nancy, 'History, Postmodernism, and Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*', *PMLA*, Vol. 109, No. 5 (October 1994), pp.982-994.
- Peterson, Nancy, *Against Amnesia: Contemporary Women Writers and the Crises of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).
- Pfeiffer, Steven, and Vicki B. Stocking, 'Vulnerabilities of Academically Gifted Students', *Special Services in the Schools*, Vol. 16: Nos. 1-2 (2000) pp.83-93.
- Pifer, Ellen, *Demon or Doll: Images of the Child in Contemporary Writing and Culture* (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 2000)
- Pinfold, Debbie, *The Child's View of the Third Reich in German Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- Pitchford, Nicola, *Tactical Readings: Feminist Postmodernism in the Novels of Kathy Acker and Angela Carter* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002).
- Pitchford, Nicola, *Tactical Readings: Feminist Postmodernism in the Novels of Kathy Acker and Angela Carter* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002).
- Plasa, Carl, and Betty J. Ring (eds.), *The Discourse of Slavery* (Oxford: Routledge, 1993).
- Platt, Len, and Sara Upstone, 'Introduction', in Platt and Upstone (eds.), *Postmodern Literature and Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) pp.1-11.
- Pogrebin, Loretta Cottin, 'Do Americans Hate Children?', in *Ms. Magazine* (November 1983), pp.47-50.
- Pollarine, Joshua, 'Children at War: Underage Americans Illegally Fighting the Second World War' (2008), *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*, No. 191. Accessed at https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/191?utm_source=scholarworks.umt.edu%2Fetd%2F191&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages, 17/04/2020.
- Pomeroy, Wendy, 'Trauma, Regression, and Recovery', *Transactional Analysis Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (1998), pp.331-340.

- Postman, Neil, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York and London: Penguin, 1986).
- Postman, Neil, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1982).
- Potenza, Mark N., Kyle Faust and David Faust (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Technologies and Mental Health* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
- Powers, Richard, *Operation Wandering Soul* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002).
- Prout, Alan, *The Future of Childhood* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2005).
- Purdy, Strother, 'Gravity's Rainbow and the Culture of Childhood', in *Pynchon Notes*, Vol. 22-23 (1988), pp.7-23
- Pütz, Manfred, 'The Art of the Acronym in Thomas Pynchon', *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (1991), pp.371-82.
- Pynchon, Thomas, *Against the Day* (London: Vintage, 2007).
- Pynchon, Thomas, *Bleeding Edge* (London: Vintage, 2014).
- Pynchon, Thomas, *Gravity's Rainbow* (London: Vintage, 2000).
- Pynchon, Thomas, *Mason & Dixon* (London: Vintage, 1998).
- Pynchon, Thomas, *Slow Learner* (London: Vintage, 2000). Pynchon, Thomas, *The Crying of Lot 49* (London: Vintage, 2000).
- Pynchon, Thomas, *V.* (London: Vintage, 2000).
- Pynchon, Thomas, *Vineland* (London: Vintage, 2000).
- Qvortrup, Jens, 'Are Children Human Beings or Human Becomings', *Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Sociali*, Vol.117, No.3/4 (December 2009), pp. 631-653.
- Qvortrup, Jens, 'Varieties of Childhood', in Jens Qvortrup (ed.), *Studies in Modern Childhood: Society, Agency, Culture*, (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), pp.1-20.
- Raabe, Tobias, and Andreas Beelmann, 'Development of Ethnic, Racial, and National Prejudice in Childhood and Adolescence: A Multinational Meta-Analysis of Age Differences', *Child Development*, Vol. 82, No. 6 (November/December 2011), pp.1715-1737.
- Radd, Sharon, and Tanetha Jamay Grosland, 'Desirabilizing Whiteness: A Discursive Practice in Social Justice Leadership that Entrenches White Supremacy', *Urban Education*, Vol. 54, No.5, (2019), pp.656–676.
- Ramirez, Manuela Lopez, 'The Shell-Shocked Veteran in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Home*', *Atlantis*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2016), pp.129-147.
- Reed, Ishmael, 'Mark Twain's Hairball', in Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors (ed.), *A New Literary History of America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp.380-4.
- Reed, Ishmael, *Mumbo Jumbo* (St Ives: Penguin, 2017).
- Reed, Ishmael, *The Free-Lance Pall Bearers*, (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1999).
- Reed, Ishmael, *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (London: Allison & Busby, 1995).
- Reed, Lori, and Paula Sakkho (eds.), *Governing the Female Body: Gender, Health, and Networks of Power* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2012).

- Reid, E. Shelley, 'The Stories We Tell: Louise Erdrich's Identity Narratives', *MELUS*, vol. 25, No. 3-4 (Autumn-Winter 2000), pp.65-86.
- Reid-Walsh, Jacqueline, *Interactive Books: Playful Media Before Pop-Ups* (New York; Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).
- Reifman, Alan, Malinda J. Colwell and Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, 'Emerging Adulthood: Theory, Assessment and Application', *Journal of Youth Development*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Summer 2007), pp.1-12.
- Renfro, Paul, *Stranger Danger: Family Values, Childhood, and the American Carceral State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
- Renner, Karen, (ed.), *The "Evil Child" in Literature, Film and Popular Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013).
- Renner, Karen, 'Evil Children in Film and Literature', in Karen Renner (ed.), *The "Evil Child" in Literature, Film and Popular Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), pp.1-27.
- Renner, Karen, *The Evil Child in the Popular Imagination* (New York; Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
- Reynolds, Simon, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011).
- Roberts, Dorothy, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage, 1997).
- Robinson, Ann, and Pamela R. Clinkenbeard, 'History of Giftedness: Perspectives from the Past Presage Modern Scholarship', in Steven I. Pfeifer (ed.), *Handbook of Giftedness in Children: Psychoeducational Theory, Research, and Best Practices* (New York: Springer, 2008), pp.13-32.
- Robinson, Fred Miller, 'Nonsense and Sadness in Donald Barthelme and Edward Lear', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 80 (1981), pp.164-76
- Robson, Catherine, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girl of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).
- Roedell, Wendy, 'Vulnerabilities of Highly Gifted Children', *Roeper Review: A Journal on Gifted Education*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1984), pp.127-130.
- Rohland, Mark, "'Feeling Totally Familied Out': Teaching Pynchon Through Families', in Thomas H. Schaub (ed.), *Approaches to Teaching Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 and Other Works* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008) pp.46-51.
- Romero, Channette, *Activism and the American Novel: Religion and Resistance in Fiction by Women of Colour* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).
- Roof, Judith, 'Everett's Hypernarrator', *Canadian Review of American Studies*, Vol. 43, No.2 (2013), pp.202-15 (p.203); see also Michael Feith, 'Hire-a-Glyph: Hermetics and Hermeunetics in Percival Everett's Glyph', *Canadian Review of American Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2013), pp.301-19.
- Roozen, David, Jackson W. Carroll, and Wade Clark Roof, 'Fifty Years of Religious Change in the United States', in Roozen, Carroll, and Roof (eds.), *The Post-War Generation and Establishment Religion: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2018), pp.59-86.
- Rorabaugh, William Joseph, *American Hippies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- Rose, Jacqueline, *The Case of Peter Pan, Or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Basingtoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1994).

- Rose, Jacqueline, *The Case of Peter Pan, Or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1994).
- Rosen, David, *Child Soldiers in Western Imagination: From Patriots to Victims* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015).
- Rosen, Rachel and Katherine Twamley, 'The woman-child question: a dialogue in the borderlands', in Rosen and Twamley (eds.), *Feminism and the Politics of Childhood: Friends or Foes?* (London: UCL Press, 2018), pp.1-20.
- Ross, Fran, *Oreo* (London: Picador, 2018).
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Emile, Or, On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979).
- Roynon, Tessa, *Toni Morrison and the Classical Tradition: Transforming American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- Rubin, Jerry Rubin, *Do It: Scenarios of the Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970).
- Rubin, Jerry, *We Are Everywhere* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).
- Rushdy, Ashraf H. A., 'Daughters Signifyin[g] History: The Example of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*', in William Andrews and Nellie McKay (eds.), *Toni Morrison's Beloved: A Casebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.37-66.
- Russell, Kara, 'Bertha Harris' *Confessions of Cherubino*: From L'Ecriture Feminine to the Gothic South' (MA dissertation, 2018) Electronic Theses and Dissertations. Paper 3401. <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/3401> (accessed 02/04/2020).
- Russell, Wendy, Stuart Lester and Hilary Smith, 'Perspectives on Play Research', in Wendy Russell, Stuart Lester and Hilary Smith (eds.), *Practice-based Research in Children's Play* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2018), pp.1-15
- Saal, Ilka and Bertram D. Ashe (eds.), *Slavery and the Post-Black Imagination* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020).
- Sabin, Roger, *Adult Comics* (New York; London: Routledge, 2013).
- Sagan, Olivia, 'Narratives of Loneliness and Mental Ill Health in a time of Neoliberalism', in Olivia Sagan and Eric Miller (ed.), *Narratives of Loneliness: Multidisciplinary Perspectives from the 21st Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017) pp.88-100.
- Said, Edward, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).
- Salter, Anastasia and Blodgett, Bridget, *Toxic Geek Masculinity in Media: Sexism, Trolling, and Identity Policing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).
- Salvatore, Anne, 'Toni Morrison's New Bildungsromane: Paired Characters and Antithetical Form in *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *Beloved*', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp.154-178.
- Salvatore, Anne, 'Toni Morrison's New Bildungsromane: Paired Characters and Antithetical Form in *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *Beloved*', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp.154-178
- Savage, Jon, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (London: Pimlico, 2007).
- Savvas, Theophilus, *American Postmodernist Fiction and the Past* (London and New York: MacMillan, 2011).
- Sayers, Nicola, *The Promise of Nostalgia: Reminiscence, Longing and Hope in Contemporary American Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

- Schreiber, Evelyn Jaffe, *Race, Trauma and Home in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010).
- Schwerdtfeger, Barbara, *Ethics in Postmodern Fiction: Donald Barthelme and William Gass* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2005).
- Sciolino, Martina, 'Kathy Acker and the Postmodern Subject of Feminism', *College English*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (April. 1990), pp.437-445.
- Scott, Sharon, *Toys and American Culture: An Encyclopaedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010).
- Scott, Steven, *The Gamefulness of American Postmodernism: John Barth & Louise Erdrich* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).
- Seed, David, *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (London: MacMillan, 1988).
- Sergi, Jennifer, 'Tradition and Preservation in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*', *World Literature Today*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp.279-82.
- Sheffler, Julia, Ian Stanley, Natalie Sachs-Ericsson, 'ACEs and Mental Health Outcomes', in Gordon J.G. Asmunson and Tracie O. Afifi (eds.), *Adverse Childhood Experiences: Using Evidence to Advance Research, Practice, Policy, and Prevention* (Academic Press, 2020), pp.47-69.
- Shepperd, Walt, 'When State Magicians Fail: An Interview with Ishmael Reed', in Bruce Dick and Amritjit Singh (eds.), *Conversations with Ishmael Reed* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1995), pp.3-13.
- Sheridan, Jayne, *Fashion, Media, Promotion: The New Black Magic* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), pp.143-188.
- Shroeder, Shannin, *Rediscovering Magical Realism in the Americas* (Westport and London: Praeger, 2003).
- Silbergleif, Robin, 'Speaking (in) the Silences: Gender and Anti-Narrative in Carole Maso's *Defiance*', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Fall 2010), pp. 331-349.
- Simmons, David, *The Anti-Hero in the American Novel: From Joseph Heller to Kurt Vonnegut* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).
- Simpson, Rita, *Black Looks and Black Acts: The Language of Toni Morrison in The Bluest Eye and Beloved* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p.40.
- Singer, Dorothy G. Singer and Jerome L. Singer, *The House of Make-Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
- Singer, Peter Warren, *Children at War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
- Sipe, Lawrence and Sylvia Pantaleo (eds.), *Postmodern Picturebooks: Play, Parody, and Self-Referentiality* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008).
- Slack, Kristen, Sarah Font and Jennifer Jones, 'The Complex Interplay of Adverse Childhood Experiences, Race, and Income', *Health Social Work*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Feb 2017), pp.24-31.
- Slout, William, and Sue Rudisill, 'The Enigma of the Master Betty Mania', *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Summer 1974), pp.81-90.
- Spann, Edward, *Democracy's Children: The Young Rebels of the 1960s and the Power of Ideals* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2003).
- Sparks, Holloway, 'Queens, Teens, and Model Mothers: Race, Gender, and the Discourse of Welfare Reform', in Joe Soss, Sanford F. Schram, and Richard C. Fording (eds.), *Race and the Politics of Welfare Reform* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), pp.171-195

- Spencer, Rochelle, 'Toni Cade Bambara', in Yolanda Williams Page (ed.), *An Encyclopaedia of African American Women Writers*, vol. I (Westport; London: Greenwood Press), pp.28-34 (p.30).
- Spigel, Lynn, 'Seducing the Innocent: Childhood and Television in Postwar America', in *Ruthless Criticism: New Perspectives in U.S. Communication History*, ed. W.S. Solomon and R.W. McChesney (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp.259-90.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1988), pp.271-313.
- Spock, Benjamin, *Rebuilding America Family Values: A Better World for our Children* (Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books, 1996).
- Stannard, David, 'Death and the Puritan Child', *American Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No.5 (December 1974), pp.456-476.
- Starobinski, Jean, 'The Idea of Nostalgia', trans. William S. Kemp, *Diogenes*, Vol. 14, No. 54 (1966), pp.81-103.
- Stave, Shirley Ann, 'Jazz and Paradise: Pivotal Moments in Black History', in Justine Tally (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.59-74.
- Stave, Shirley, (ed.), *Toni Morrison and the Bible: Contested Intertextualities* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).
- Steinberg, Shirley, and Joe Kincheloe, *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).
- Stephen J. Burn (ed.) *Conversations with David Foster Wallace* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012).
- Stern, Barbara, 'Historical and Personal Nostalgia in Advertising Text: The Fin de siècle Effect', *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (December 1992), pp.11-22.
- Stimpson, Catherine, 'Pre-Apocalyptic Atavism: Thomas Pynchon's Early Fiction', in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Thomas Pynchon* (New York; New Haven; Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), pp.77-92.
- Stockton, Kathryn Bond, *The Queer Child, Or, Growing Up Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).
- Stone, Lawrence, and Gabrielle M. Spiegel, 'History and Post-Modernism', *Past & Present*, No. 135 (May, 1992), pp.189-208.
- Storhoff, Gary, 'Family Systems in Louise Erdrich's *The Beet Queen*', *Critique*, Vol .39, No. 4 (1998), pp.341-352.
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly* (Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2009).
- Stroup, William, 'The Romantic Child', *Literature Compass*, 1:1 (2004), pp.1-5.
- van Styvendale, Nancy, 'The Trans/Historicity of Trauma in Jeanette Armstrong's *Slash* and Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer*', *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 40, No. 1/2, (Spring & Summer 2008), pp.203-223.
- Sukenick, Ronald, *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories* (New York: Dial Press, 1969), pp.48-49.
- Sukenick, Ronald, *Up* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968).
- Sundquist, Eric, 'Introduction', in Eric J. Sundquist (ed.), *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.1-44.
- Sutton-Smith, Brian, *Toys as Culture* (New York: Gardner Press, 1986).

- Tabbi, Joseph, 'Pynchon's Groundward Art', in Geoffrey Greene, Donald J. Grenier and Larry McCaffrey (eds.), *The Vineland Papers* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994), pp.89-100.
- Tally, Justine, 'The Morrison Trilogy', in Justine Tally (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.75-91.
- Tally, Robert, *Kurt Vonnegut and the American Novel: A Postmodern Iconography* (London: Continuum, 2011).
- Tholfsen, Trygve R., 'Postmodern theory of History: A Critique', *Memoria y Civilización*, No. 2 (1999), pp.203-222.
- Thorne, Barrie and Marilyn Yalom (eds.), *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992).
- Thurschwell, Pamela, 'Dead Boys and Adolescent Girls: Unjoining the Bildungsroman in Carson McCuller's *The Member of the Wedding* and Toni Morrison's *Sula*', *English Studies in Canada*, Vol. 38, No. 3-4 (2012), pp.105-128.
- Thurschwell, Pamela, 'Dead Boys and Adolescent Girls: Unjoining the Bildungsroman in Carson McCuller's *The Member of the Wedding* and Toni Morrison's *Sula*', *English Studies in Canada*, Vol. 38, No. 3-4 (2012), pp.105-128.
- Time Magazine, '50 Years Ago This Week: How Young People Changed the World', <<https://time.com/4607270/1967-january-6-anniversary/>> [accessed 23 August 2019]
- Tincknell, Estella, *Mediating the Family: Gender, Culture and Representation* (London: Hodder Education, 2005).
- Tingstad, Vebjørn, 'Researching Children in a Digital Age: Theoretical Perspectives and Observations from the Field', in Russell W. Belk and Rosa Llamas (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Digital Consumption* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp.113-23.
- Tresco, Matt, 'Impervious to U.S. Parsing: Encyclopedism, Autism, and Infinite Jest', in *Consider David Foster Wallace*, pp.113-122.
- Valkenburg, Patti M, *Children's Responses to the Screen: A Media Psychological Approach* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004).
- Valkenburg, Patti M, and Jessica Taylor Piotrowski (eds.), *Plugged in: How Media Attract and Affect Youth* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017).
- Van Der Akker, Robin, Alison Gibbons and Timotheus Vermeulen (eds.), *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth after Postmodernism* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017).
- Vees-Gulani, Susan, 'Diagnosing Billy Pilgrim: A Psychiatric Approach to Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*', *Critique*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Winter 2003), pp.175-184.
- Vonnegut, Kurt, *Breakfast of Champions* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.135-7.
- Vonnegut, Kurt, *Cat's Cradle* (London; New York: Penguin, 2008).
- Vonnegut, Kurt, *Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death* (London: Vintage, 2000).
- Waite, Roberta and Ruth Ann Ryan, *Adverse Childhood Experiences: What Students and Health Professionals Need to Know* (London and Oxford: Routledge, 2020)
- Walkerdine, Valerie, *Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

- Wallace, David Foster, 'Tense Present: Democracy, English and the Wars over Usage', *Harper's Magazine* (April 2001), pp.39-58;
- Wallace, David Foster, "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction", in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* (London: Abacus, 1998), pp.21-82.
- Wallace, David Foster, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (London: Abacus, 2001).
- Wallace, David Foster, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (London: Abacus, 2001)
- Wallace, David Foster, *Girl with Curious Hair* ((New York; London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1989).
- Wallace, David Foster, *Infinite Jest* (London: Abacus, 2014).
- Wallace, David Foster, *Oblivion: Stories* (London: Abacus, 2014).
- Wallace, David Foster, *Oblivion: Stories* (London: Abacus, 2014).
- Wallace, David Foster, *The Broom of the System* (London: Abacus, 1997)
- Wallace, David Foster, *The Pale King: An Unfinished Novel* (London: Penguin, 2012).
- Wallace, David Foster, *The Pale King: An Unfinished Novel* (London: Penguin, 2012).
- Wallace, David Foster, *This is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2009).
- Wasylw, Patricia Healy, *Martyrdom, Murder and Magic: Child Saints and their Cults in Medieval Europe* (New York; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008).
- Waters, Hazel, "'That Astonishing Clever Child': Performers and Prodigies in the Early and Mid-Victorian Theatre", *Theatre Notebook*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1996), pp.78-94.
- Weisenburger, Steven, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion: Sources and Contexts for Pynchon's Novel*, 2nd ed. (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2006).
- Wepler, Ryan, "'I Can't Tell If You're Being Serious or Not': Vonnegut's Comic Realism in *Slaughterhouse-Five*", *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* (HJEAS), vol. 17, no. 1 (2011), pp.97-126.
- Wetmore, Kevin J. (ed.), *Uncovering Stranger Things: Essays on Eighties Nostalgia* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2018).
- Whitehead, Anne, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).
- Widom, Cathy Spatz, Joan McCord, Nancy A. Crowell, (eds.), *Juvenile Crime, Juvenile Justice* (National Academies Press, 2001).
- Wilcox, Brian, and Dale Kunkel, "Taking Television Seriously: Children and Television Policy", in Edward F. Zigler, Sharon Lynn Kagan, and Nancy W. Hall (eds.), *Children, Families and Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.333-350.
- Wilkie-Stibbs, Christine, *The Outside Child, In and Out of the Book* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).
- Winn, Marie, *Children without Childhood* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).
- Winn, Marie, *The Plug-in Drug: Television, Children and the Family* (New York: Viking Press, 1977).
- Winston, Mathew, 'The Quest for Pynchon', *Twentieth-Century Literature*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (October 1975), pp.278-287.

- Winterson, Jeanette, 'Introduction', in Amy Scholder and Dennis Cooper (eds.), *Essential Acker: The Selected Writings of Kathy Acker* (New York: Grove Press, 2002), pp.i-xi (p.vii).
- Woo, Benjamin, *Getting a Life: The Social Worlds of Geek Culture* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018).
- Wood, Naomi, 'Angelic, Atavistic, Human: The Child of the Victorian Period', in Gavin (ed.), *The Child in British Literature*, pp.116-23.
- Wordsworth, William, 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey', *The Major Works*, pp.131-5.
- Wordsworth, William, 'Ode', in Stephen Gill (ed.), *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), pp.297-302.
- Wordsworth, William, *The Prelude (1850 version)*, in Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill, (eds.), *The Prelude: 1899, 1805, 1850* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979), Book V, ll.317-18, 337-8.
- Yelland, Nicola (ed.), *Gender in Early Childhood* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).
- Zaretsky, Natasha, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
- Zelizer, Viviana, *Pricing the Priceless Child* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

